

if she would not care to see one of the maids upstairs; and she jumped at the excuse, leaving me upon the landing to watch her hurriedly mounting to the bedroom storey above.

When she was gone, I went back to the conservatory and drank a cup of tea, always the best promotor of clear thought; and for some ten minutes I turned the thing over in my mind. Who was Mrs Sibyl Kavanagh, and why had she sewn a brooch of brilliants to the inside of a panel of her gown—sewn it in a place where it was as safely hid from sight as though buried in the Thames? A child could have given the answer—but a child would have overlooked many things which were vital to the development of the unavoidable conclusion of the discovery. The brooch that I had seen corresponded perfectly with the crescent of which Lady Dunholme was robbed—yet it was a brooch which a hundred women might have possessed; and if I had simply stepped down and told Lady Faber, ‘the thief you are entertaining is Mrs Sibyl Kavanagh’, a slander action with damages had trodden upon the heels of the folly. Yet I would have given a hundred pounds to have been allowed full inspection of the whole panel of the woman’s dress—and I would have staked an equal sum that there had been found in it the pendant of the ripening rubies; a pendant which seemed to me the one certain clue that would end the series of jewel robberies, and the colossal mystery of the year. Now, however, the woman had gone upstairs to hide in another place whatever she had to hide; and for the time it was unlikely that a sudden searching of her dress would add to my knowledge.

A second cup of tea helped me still further on my path. It made quite clear to me the fact that the woman was the recipient of the stolen jewels, rather than the actual taker of them. She, clearly, could not use the scissors which had severed Lady Faber’s pendant from the ruby belt. A skilful man had in all probability done that—but

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which man, or perhaps men? I had long felt that the season's robberies were the work of many hands. Chance had now marked for me one pair; but it was vastly more important to know the others. The punishment of the woman would scarce stop the widespread conspiracy; the arrest of her for the possession of a crescent brooch, hid suspiciously it is true, but a brooch of a pattern which abounded in every jeweller's shop from Kensington to Temple Bar, would have been consummate lunacy. Of course, I could have taken cab to Scotland Yard, and have told my tale; but with no other support, how far would that have availed me? If the history of the surpassingly strange case were to be written, I knew that I must write it, and lose no moment in the work.

I had now got a sufficient grip upon the whole situation to act decisively, and my first step was to re-enter the ball-room, and take a partner for the next waltz. We had made some turns before I discovered that Mrs Kavanagh was again in the room, dancing with her usual dash, and seemingly in no way moved by the mishap. As we passed in the press, she even smiled at me, saying, 'I've set full sail again'; and her whole bearing convinced me of her belief that I had seen nothing.

At the end of my dance my own partner, a pretty little girl in pink, left me with the remark, 'You're awfully stupid to-night! I ask you if you've seen *Manon Lescaut*, and the only thing you say is, "The panel buttons up, I thought so".' This convinced me that it was dangerous to dance again, and I waited in the room only until the supper was ready, and Mrs Kavanagh passed me, making for the dining-room, on the arm of General Sharard. I had loitered to see what jewels she wore upon her dress; and when I had made a note of them, I slipped from the front door of the house unobserved, and took a hansom to my place in Bond Street.

At the second ring of the bell my watchman opened the door to me; and while he stood staring with profound surprise, I walked straight to one of the jewel cases in which our cheaper jewels are kept, and took therefrom a spray of diamonds, and hooked it to the inside of my coat. Then I sent the man up stairs to awaken Abel, and in five minutes my servant was with me, though he wore only his trousers and his shirt.

'Abel,' said I, 'there's good news for you. I'm on the path of the gang we're wanting.'

'Good God, sir!' cried he, 'you don't mean that!'

'Yes,' said I, 'there's a woman named Sibyl Kavanagh in it to begin with, and she's helped herself to a couple of diamond sprays, and a pendant of rubies at Lady Faber's to-night. One of the sprays I know she's got; if I could trace the pendant to her, the case would begin to look complete.'

'Whew!' he ejaculated, brightening up at the prospect of business. 'I knew there was a woman in it all along—but this one, why, she's a regular flier, ain't she, sir?'

'We'll find out her history presently. I'm going straight back to Portman Square now. Follow me in a hansom, and when you get to the house, wait inside my brougham until I come. But before you do that, run round to Marlborough Street police-station and ask them if we can have ten or a dozen men ready to mark a house in Bayswater some time between this and six o'clock to-morrow morning.'

'You're going to follow her home then?'

'Exactly, and if my wits can find a way I'm going to be her guest for ten minutes after she quits Lady Faber's. They're sure to let you have the men either at Marlborough Street or at the Harrow Road station. This business has been a disgrace to them quite long enough.'

'That's so, sir; King told me yesterday that he'd bury his head in the sand if something didn't turn up soon. You haven't given me the exact address though.'

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'Because I haven't got it. I only know that the woman lives somewhere near St Stephen's Church—she sits under, or on, one of the curates there. If you can get her address from her coachman, do so. But go and dress and be in Portman Square at the earliest possible moment.'

It was now very near one o'clock, indeed the hour struck as I passed the chapel in Orchard Street; and when I came into the square I found my own coachman waiting with the brougham at the corner by Baker Street. I told him, before I entered the house, to expect Abel; and not by any chance to draw up at Lady Faber's. Then I made my way quietly to the ball-room and observed Mrs Kavanagh—I will not say dancing, but hurling herself through the last figure of the lancers. It was evident that she did not intend to quit yet awhile; and I left her to get some supper, choosing a seat near to the door of the dining-room, so that any one passing must be seen by me. To my surprise, I had not been in the room ten minutes when she suddenly appeared in the hall, unattended, and her cloak wrapped round her; but she passed without perceiving me; and I, waiting until I heard the hall door close, went out instantly and got my wraps. Many of the guests had left already, but a few carriages and cabs were in the square, and a linkman seemed busy in the distribution of unlimited potations. It occurred to me that if Abel had not got the woman's address, this man might give it to me, and I put the plain question to him.

'That lady who just left,' said I, 'did she have a carriage or a cab?'

'Oh, you mean Mrs Kevenner,' he answered thickly, 'she's a keb, she is, allus takes a hansom, sir; 192, Westbourne Park; I don't want to ask when I see her, sir.'

'Thank you,' said I, 'she has dropped a piece of jewellery in the hall, and I thought I would drive round and return it to her.'

He looked surprised, at the notion, perhaps, of any one returning anything found in a London ball-room; but I left him with his astonishment and entered my carriage. There I found Abel crouching down under the front seat, and he met me with a piteous plea that the woman had no coachman, and that he had failed to obtain her address.

'Never mind that,' said I, as we drove off sharply, 'what did they say at the station?'

'They wanted to bring a force of police round, and arrest every one in the house, sir. I had trouble enough to hold them in, I'm sure. But I said that we'd sit down and watch if they made any fuss, and then they gave in. It's agreed now that a dozen men will be at the Harrow Road station at your call till morning. They've a wonderful confidence in you, sir.'

'It's a pity they haven't more confidence in themselves—but anyway, we are in luck. The woman's address is 192, Westbourne Park, and I seem to remember that it is a square.'

'I'm sure of it,' said he; 'it's a round square in the shape of an oblong, and one hundred and ninety two is at the side near Durham something or other; we can watch it easily from the palings.'

After this, ten minutes' drive brought us to the place, and I found it as he had said, the 'square' being really a triangle. Number one hundred and ninety-two was a big house, its outer points gone much to decay, but lighted on its second and third floors; though so far as I could see, for the blinds of the drawing-room were up, no one was moving. This did not deter me, however, and, taking my stand with Abel at the corner where two great trees gave us perfect shelter, we waited silently for many minutes, to the astonishment of the constable upon the beat, with whom I soon settled; and to his satisfaction.

'Ah,' said he, 'I knew they was rum 'uns all along; they

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owe fourteen pounds for milk, and their butcher ain't paid; young men going in all night, too—why, there's one of them there now.'

I looked through the trees at his word, and saw that he was right. A youth in an opera hat and a black coat was upon the doorstep of the house; and as the light of a street lamp fell upon his face, I recognized him. He was the boy who had eaten of the jam-tarts so plentifully at Lady Faber's—the youth with whom Sibyl Kavanagh had pretended to have no acquaintance when she talked to me in the conservatory. And at the sight of him, I knew that the moment had come.

'Abel,' I said, 'it's time you went. Tell the men to bring a short ladder with them. They'll have to come in by the balcony—but only when I make a sign. The signal will be the cracking of the glass of that lamp you can see upon the table there. Did you bring my pistol?'

'Would I forget that?' he asked; 'I brought you two, and look out! for you may want them.'

'I know that,' said I, 'but I depend upon you. Get back at the earliest possible moment, and don't act until I give the signal. It will mean that the clue is complete.'

He nodded his head, and disappeared quickly in the direction where the carriage was; but I went straight up to the house, and knocked loudly upon the door. To my surprise, it was opened at once by a thick-set man in livery, who did not appear at all astonished to see me.

'They're upstairs, sir, will you go up?' said he.

'Certainly,' said I, taking him at his word. 'Lead the way.'

This request made him hesitate.

'I beg your pardon,' said he, 'I think I have made a mistake—I'll speak to Mrs Kavanagh.'

Before I could answer he had run up the stairs nimbly; but I was quick after him; and when I came upon the

landing, I could see into the front drawing-room, where there sat the woman herself, a small and oldish man with long black whiskers, and the youth who had just come into the room. But the back room which gave off from the other with folding-doors, was empty; and there was no light in it. All this I perceived in a momentary glance, for no sooner had the serving-man spoken to the woman, than she pushed the youth out upon the balcony, and came hurriedly to the landing, closing the door behind her.

‘Why, Mr Sutton,’ she cried, when she saw me, ‘this is a surprise; I was just going to bed.’

‘I was afraid you would have been already gone,’ said I with the simplest smile possible, ‘but I found a diamond spray in Lady Faber’s hall just after you had left. The footman said it must be yours, and as I am going out of town to-morrow, I thought I would risk leaving it to-night.’

I handed to her as I spoke the spray of diamonds I had taken from my own show-case in Bond Street; but while she examined it she shot up at me a quick searching glance from her bright eyes, and her thick sensual lips were closed hard upon each other. Yet, in the next instant, she laughed again, and handed me back the jewel.

‘I’m indeed very grateful to you,’ she exclaimed, ‘but I’ve just put my spray in its case; you want to give me someone else’s property.’

‘Then it isn’t yours?’ said I, affecting disappointment. ‘I’m really very sorry for having troubled you.’

‘It is I that should be sorry for having brought you here,’ she cried. ‘Won’t you have a brandy and seltzer or something before you go?’

‘Nothing whatever, thanks,’ said I. ‘Let me apologize again for having disturbed you—and wish you “Good-night”.’

She held out her hand to me, seemingly much reassured;

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and as I began to descend the stairs, she re-entered the drawing-room for the purpose, I did not doubt, of getting the man off the balcony. The substantial lackey was then waiting in the hall to open the door for me; but I went down very slowly, for in truth the whole of my plan appeared to have failed; and at that moment I was without the veriest rag of an idea. My object in coming to the house had been to trace, and if possible to lay hands upon the woman's associates, taking her, as I hoped, somewhat by surprise; yet though I had made my chain more complete, vital links were missing; and I stood no nearer to the forging of them. That which I had to ask myself, and to answer in the space of ten seconds, was the question, 'Now, or to-morrow?'—whether I should leave the house without effort, and wait until the gang betrayed itself again; or make some bold stroke which would end the matter there and then. The latter course was the one I chose. The morrow, said I, may find these people in Paris or in Belgium; there never may be such a clue again as that of the ruby pendant—there never may be a similar opportunity of taking at least three of those for whom we had so long hunted. And with this thought a whole plan of action suddenly leaped up in my mind; and I acted upon it, silently and swiftly, and with a readiness which to this day I wonder at.

I now stood at the hall-door, which the lackey held open. One searching look at the man convinced me that my design was a sound one. He was obtuse, patronizing—but probably honest. As we faced each other I suddenly took the door-handle from him, and banged the door loudly, remaining in the hall. Then I clapped my pistol to his head (though for this offence I surmise that a judge might have given me a month), and I whispered fiercely to him:

'This house is surrounded by police; if you say a word I'll give you seven years as an accomplice of the woman

upstairs, whom we are going to arrest. When she calls out, answer that I'm gone, and then come back to me for instructions. If you do as I tell you, you shall not be charged—otherwise, you go to jail.'

At this speech the poor wretch paled before me, and shook so that I could feel the tremor all down the arm of his which I held.

'I—I won't speak, sir,' he gasped. 'I won't, I do assure you—to think as I should have served such folk.'

'Then hide me, and be quick about it—in this room here, it seems dark. Now run upstairs and say I'm gone.'

I had stepped into a little breakfast-room at the back of the dining-room, and there had gone unhesitatingly under a round table. The place was absolutely dark, and was a vantage ground, since I could see therefrom the whole of the staircase; but before the footman could mount the stairs, the woman came half-way down them, and, looking over the hall, she asked him:

'Is that gentleman gone?'

'Just left, mum,' he replied.

'Then go to bed, and never let me see you admit a stranger like that again.'

She went up again at this, and he turned to me, asking:

'What shall I do now, sir? I'll do anything if you'll speak for me, sir; I've got twenty years' kerecter from Lord Walley; to think as she's a bad 'un—it's hardly creditable.'

'I shall speak for you,' said I, 'if you do exactly what I tell you. Are any more men expected now?'

'Yes, there's two more; the capting and the clergymen, pretty clergymen he must be, too.'

'Never mind that; wait and let them in. Then go upstairs and turn the light out on the staircase as if by accident. After that you can go to bed.'

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'Did you say the police was 'ere?' he asked in his hoarse whisper; and I said:

'Yes, they're everywhere, on the roof, and in the street, and on the balcony. If there's the least resistance, the house will swarm with them.'

What he would have said to this I cannot tell, for at that moment there was another knock upon the front door, and he opened it instantly. Two men, one in clerical dress, and one, a very powerful man, in a Newmarket coat, went quickly upstairs, and the butler followed them. A moment later the gas went out on the stairs; and there was no sound but the echo of the talk in the front drawing-room.

The critical moment in my night's work had now come. Taking off my boots, and putting my revolver at the half-cock, I crawled up the stairs with the step of a cat, and entered the back drawing-room. One of the folding doors of this was ajar, so that a false step would probably have cost me my life—and I could not possibly tell if the police were really in the street, or only upon their way. But it was my good luck that the men talked loudly, and seemed actually to be disputing. The first thing I observed on looking through the open door was that the woman had left the four to themselves. Three of them stood about the table whereon the lamp was; the dumpy man with the black whiskers sat in his arm-chair. But the most pleasing sight of all was that of a large piece of cotton-wool spread upon the table and almost covered with brooches, locketts, and sprays of diamonds; and to my infinite satisfaction I saw Lady Faber's pendant of rubies lying conspicuous even amongst the wealth of jewels which the light showed.

There then was the clue; but how was it to be used? It came to me suddenly that four consummate rogues such as these would not be unarmed. Did I step into the room, they might shoot me at the first sound; and if the police

had not come, there would be the end of it. Had opportunity been permitted to me, I would, undoubtedly, have waited five or ten minutes to assure myself that Abel was in the street without. But this was not to be. Even as I debated the point, a candle's light shone upon the staircase; and in another moment Mrs Kavanagh herself stood in the doorway watching me. For one instant she stood, but it served my purpose; and as a scream rose upon her lips, and I felt my heart thudding against my ribs, I threw open the folding doors, and deliberately shot down the glass of the lamp which had cast the aureola of light upon the stolen jewels.

As the glass flew, for my reputation as a pistol shot was not belied in this critical moment, Mrs Kavanagh ran in a wild fit of hysterical screaming to her bedroom above—but the four men turned with loud cries to the door where they had seen me; and as I saw them coming, I prayed that Abel might be there. This thought need not have occurred to me. Scarce had the men taken two steps when the glass of the balcony windows was burst in with a crash, and the whole room seemed to fill with police.

* * *

I cannot now remember precisely the sentences which were passed upon the great gang (known to police history as the Westbourne Park gang) of jewel thieves; but the history of that case is curious enough to be worthy of mention. The husband of the woman Kavanagh—he of the black whiskers—was a man of the name of Whyte, formerly a manager in the house of James Thorndike, the Universal Provider near the Tottenham Court Road. Whyte's business had been to provide all things needful for dances; and, though it astonishes me to write it, he had even found dancing men for ladies whose range of acquaintance was narrow. In the course of business, he set up for himself

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eventually; and as he worked, the bright idea came to him, why not find as guests men who may snap up, in the heat and the security of the dance, such unconsidered trifles as sprays, pendants, and lockets. To this end he married, and his wife being a clever woman who fell in with his idea, she—under the name of Kavanagh—made the acquaintance of a number of youths whose business it was to dance; and eventually wormed herself into many good houses. The trial brought to light the extraordinary fact that no less than twenty-three men and eight women were bound in this amazing conspiracy, and that Kavanagh acted as the buyer of the property they stole, giving them a third of the profits, and swindling them outrageously. He, I believe, is now taking the air at Portland; and the other young men are finding in the exemplary exercise of picking oakum, work for idle hands to do.

As for Mrs Kavanagh, she was dramatic to the end of it; and, as I learnt from King, she insisted on being arrested in bed.

II

The Case of Laker, Absconded

Arthur Morrison

There were several of the larger London banks and insurance offices from which Hewitt held a sort of general retainer as detective adviser, in fulfilment of which he was regularly consulted as to the measures to be taken in different cases of fraud, forgery, theft, and so forth, which it might be the misfortune of the particular firms to encounter. The more important and intricate of these cases were placed in his hands entirely, with separate commissions, in the usual way. One of the most important companies of the sort was the General Guarantee Society, an insurance corporation which, among other risks, took those of the integrity of secretaries, clerks, and cashiers. In the case of a cash-box elopement on the part of any person guaranteed by the society, the directors were naturally anxious for a speedy capture of the culprit, and more especially of the booty, before too much of it was spent, in order to lighten the claim upon their funds, and in work of this sort Hewitt was at times engaged, either in general advice and direction or in the actual pursuit of the plunder and the plunderer.

Arriving at his office a little later than usual one morning, Hewitt found an urgent message awaiting him from the

General Guarantee Society, requesting his attention to a robbery which had taken place on the previous day. He had gleaned some hint of the case from the morning paper, wherein appeared a short paragraph, which ran thus:

SERIOUS BANK ROBBERY.—In the course of yesterday a clerk employed by Messrs Liddle, Neal & Liddle, the well-known bankers, disappeared, having in his possession a large sum of money, the property of his employers—a sum reported to be rather over £15,000. It would seem that he had been entrusted to collect the money in his capacity of 'walk-clerk' from various other banks and trading concerns during the morning, but failed to return at the usual time. A large number of the notes which he received had been cashed at the Bank of England before suspicion was aroused. We understand that Detective-Inspector Plummer, of Scotland Yard, has the case in hand.

The clerk, whose name was Charles William Laker, had, it appeared from the message, been guaranteed in the usual way by the General Guarantee Society, and Hewitt's presence at the office was at once desired in order that steps might quickly be taken for the man's apprehension and in the recovery, at any rate, of as much of the booty as possible.

A smart hansom brought Hewitt to Threadneedle Street in a bare quarter of an hour, and there a few minutes' talk with the manager, Mr Lyster, put him in possession of the main facts of the case, which appeared to be simple. Charles William Laker was twenty-five years of age, and had been in the employ of Messrs Liddle, Neal & Liddle for something more than seven years—since he left school, in fact—and until the previous day there had been nothing in his conduct to complain of. His duties as walk-clerk consisted in making a certain round, beginning at about half-past ten each morning. There were a certain number of the more important

banks between which and Messrs Liddle, Neal & Liddle there were daily transactions, and a few smaller semi-private banks and merchant firms acting as financial agents with whom there was business intercourse of less importance and regularity; and each of these, as necessary, he visited in turn, collecting cash due on bills and other instruments of a like nature. He carried a wallet, fastened securely to his person by a chain, and this wallet contained the bills and the cash. Usually at the end of his round, when all his bills had been converted into cash, the wallet held very large sums. His work and responsibilities, in fine, were those common to walk-clerks in all banks.

On the day of the robbery he had started out as usual—possibly a little earlier than was customary—and the bills and other securities in his possession represented considerably more than £15,000. It had been ascertained that he had called in the usual way at each establishment on the round, and had transacted his business at the last place by about a quarter-past one, being then, without doubt, in possession of cash to the full value of the bills negotiated. After that, Mr Lyster said, yesterday's report was that nothing more had been heard of him. But this morning there had been a message to the effect that he had been traced out of the country—to Calais, at least, it was thought. The directors of the society wished Hewitt to take the case in hand personally and at once, with a view of recovering what was possible from the plunder by way of salvage; also, of course, of finding Laker, for it is an important moral gain to guarantee societies, as an example, if a thief is caught and punished. Therefore Hewitt and Mr Lyster, as soon as might be, made for Messrs Liddle, Neal & Liddle's, that the investigation might be begun.

The bank premises were quite near—in Leadenhall Street. Having arrived there, Hewitt and Mr Lyster made their way to the firm's private rooms. As they were passing

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an outer waiting-room, Hewitt noticed two women. One, the elder, in widow's weeds, was sitting with her head bowed in her hand over a small writing-table. Her face was not visible, but her whole attitude was that of a person overcome with unbearable grief; and she sobbed quietly. The other was a young woman of twenty-two or twenty-three. Her thick black veil revealed no more than that her features were small and regular and that her face was pale and drawn. She stood with a hand on the elder woman's shoulder, and she quickly turned her head away as the two men entered.

Mr Neal, one of the partners, received them in his own room. 'Good-morning, Mr Hewitt,' he said, when Mr Lyster had introduced the detective. 'This is a serious business—very. I think I am sorrier for Laker himself than for anybody else, ourselves included—or, at any rate, I am sorrier for his mother. She is waiting now to see Mr Liddle, as soon as he arrives—Mr Liddle has known the family for a long time. Miss Shaw is with her, too, poor girl. She is a governess, or something of that sort, and I believe she and Laker were engaged to be married. It's all very sad.'

'Inspector Plummer, I understand,' Hewitt remarked, 'has the affair in hand, on behalf of the police?'

'Yes,' Mr Neal replied; 'in fact, he's here now, going through the contents of Laker's desk, and so forth; he thinks it possible Laker may have had accomplices. Will you see him?'

'Presently. Inspector Plummer and I are old friends. We met last, I think, in the case of the Stanway cameo, some months ago. But, first, will you tell me how long Laker has been a walk-clerk?'

'Barely four months, although he has been with us altogether seven years. He was promoted to the walk soon after the beginning of the year.'

'Do you know anything of his habits—what he used to do in his spare time, and so forth?'

'Not a great deal. He went in for boating, I believe, though I have heard it whispered that he had one or two more expensive tastes—expensive, that is, for a young man in his position,' Mr Neal explained, with a dignified wave of the hand that he peculiarly affected. He was a stout old gentleman, and the gesture suited him.

'You have had no reason to suspect him of dishonesty before, I take it?'

'Oh, no. He made a wrong return once, I believe, that went for some time undetected, but it turned out, after all, to be a clerical error—a mere clerical error.'

'Do you know anything of his associates out of the office?'

'No, how should I? I believe Inspector Plummer has been making inquiries as to that, however, of the other clerks. Here he is, by the bye, I expect. Come in!'

It was Plummer who had knocked, and he came in at Mr Neal's call. He was a middle-sized, small-eyed, impenetrable-looking man, as yet of no great reputation in the force. Some of my readers may remember his connection with that case, so long a public mystery, that I have elsewhere fully set forth and explained under the title of 'The Stanway Cameo Mystery'. Plummer carried his billy-cock hat in one hand and a few papers in the other. He gave Hewitt good-morning, placed his hat on a chair, and spread the papers on the table.

'There's not a great deal here,' he said, 'but one thing's plain—Laker had been betting. See here, and here, and here'—he took a few letters from the bundle in his hand—'two letters from a bookmaker about settling—wonder he trusted a clerk—several telegrams from tipsters, and a letter from some friend—only signed by initials—asking Laker to put a sovereign on a horse for the friend "with

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his own". I'll keep these, I think. It may be worth while to see that friend, if we can find him. Ah, we often find it's betting, don't we, Mr Hewitt? Meanwhile, there's no news from France yet.'

'You are sure that is where he is gone?' asked Hewitt.

'Well, I'll tell you what we've done as yet. First, of course, I went round to all the banks. There was nothing to be got from that. The cashiers all knew him by sight, and one was a personal friend of his. He had called as usual, said nothing in particular, cashed his bills in the ordinary way, and finished up at the Eastern Consolidated Bank at about a quarter-past one. So far there was nothing whatever. But I had started two or three men meanwhile making inquiries at the railway stations, and so on. I had scarcely left the Eastern Consolidated when one of them came after me with news. He had tried Palmer's Tourist Office, although that seemed an unlikely place, and there struck the track.'

'Had he been there?'

'Not only had he been there, but he had taken a tourist ticket for France. It was quite a smart move, in a way. You see it was the sort of ticket that lets you do pretty well what you like; you have the choice of two or three different routes to begin with, and you can break your journey where you please, and make all sorts of variations. So that a man with a ticket like that, and a few hours' start, could twist about on some remote branch route, and strike off in another direction altogether, with a new ticket, from some out-of-the-way place, while we were carefully sorting out and inquiring along the different routes he *might* have taken. Not half a bad move for a new hand; but he made one bad mistake, as new hands always do—as old hands do, in fact, very often. He was fool enough to give his own name, C. Laker! Although that didn't matter much, as the description was enough to fix him.

There he was, wallet and all, just as he had come from the Eastern Consolidated Bank. He went straight from there to Palmer's, by the bye, and probably in a cab. We judge that by the time. He left the Eastern Consolidated at a quarter-past one, and was at Palmer's by twenty-five-past—ten minutes. The clerk at Palmer's remembered the time because he was anxious to get out to his lunch, and kept looking at the clock, expecting another clerk in to relieve him. Laker didn't take much in the way of luggage, I fancy. We inquired carefully at the stations, and got the porters to remember the passengers for whom they had been carrying luggage, but none appeared to have had any dealings with our man. That, of course, is as one would expect. He'd take as little as possible with him, and buy what he wanted on the way, or when he'd reached his hiding-place. Of course, I wired to Calais (it was a Dover to Calais route ticket) and sent a couple of smart men off by the 8.15 mail from Charing Cross. I expect we shall hear from them in the course of the day. I am being kept in London in view of something expected at headquarters, or I should have been off myself.'

'That is all, then, up to the present? Have you anything else in view?'

'That's all I've absolutely ascertained at present. As for what I'm going to do'—a slight smile curled Plummer's lip—'well, I shall see. I've a thing or two in my mind.'

Hewitt smiled slightly himself; he recognized Plummer's touch of professional jealousy. 'Very well,' he said, rising, 'I'll make an inquiry or two for myself at once. Perhaps, Mr Neal, you'll allow one of your clerks to show me the banks, in their regular order, at which Laker called yesterday. I think I'll begin at the beginning.'

Mr Neal offered to place at Hewitt's disposal anything or anybody the bank contained, and the conference broke up. As Hewitt, with the clerk, came through the rooms

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separating Mr Neal's sanctum from the outer office, he fancied he saw the two veiled women leaving by a side door.

The first bank was quite close to Liddle, Neal & Liddle's. There the cashier who had dealt with Laker the day before remembered nothing in particular about the interview. Many other walk-clerks had called during the morning, as they did every morning, and the only circumstances of the visit that he could say anything definite about were those recorded in figures in the books. He did not know Laker's name till Plummer had mentioned it in making inquiries on the previous afternoon. As far as he could remember, Laker behaved much as usual, though really he did not notice much; he looked chiefly at the bills. He described Laker in a way that corresponded with the photograph that Hewitt had borrowed from the bank; a young man with a brown moustache and ordinary-looking fairly regular face, dressing much as other clerks dressed—tall hat, black cutaway coat, and so on. The numbers of the notes handed over had already been given to Inspector Plummer, and these Hewitt did not trouble about.

The next bank was in Cornhill, and here the cashier was a personal friend of Laker's—at any rate, an acquaintance—and he remembered a little more. Laker's manner had been quite as usual, he said; certainly he did not seem preoccupied or excited in his manner. He spoke for a moment or two—of being on the river on Sunday, and so on—and left in his usual way.

'Can you remember *everything* he said?' Hewitt asked. 'If you can tell me, I should like to know exactly what he did and said to the smallest particular.'

'Well, he saw me a little distance off—I was behind there, at one of the desks—and raised his hand to me, and said, "How d'ye do?" I came across and took his bills, and dealt with them in the usual way. He had a new umbrella lying on the counter—rather a handsome umbrella

—and I made a remark about the handle. He took it up to show me, and told me it was a present he had just received from a friend. It was a gorse-root handle, with two silver bands, one with his monogram, C.W.L. I said it was a very nice handle, and asked him whether it was fine in his district on Sunday. He said he had been up the river, and it was very fine there. And I think that was all.'

'Thank you. Now about this umbrella. Did he carry it rolled? Can you describe it in detail?'

'Well, I've told you about the handle, and the rest was much as usual, I think; it wasn't rolled—just flapping loosely, you know. It was rather an odd-shaped handle, though. I'll try and sketch it, if you like, as well as I can remember.' He did so, and Hewitt saw in the result rough indications of a gnarled crook, with one silver band near the end, and another, with the monogram, a few inches down the handle. Hewitt put the sketch in his pocket, and bade the cashier good-day.

At the next bank the story was the same as at the first—there was nothing remembered but the usual routine. Hewitt and the clerk turned down a narrow paved court, and through into Lombard Street for the next visit. The bank—that of Buller, Clayton, Ladds & Co.—was just at the corner at the end of the court, and the imposing stone entrance-porch was being made larger and more imposing still, the way being almost blocked by ladders and scaffold-poles. Here there was only the usual tale, and so on through the whole walk. The cashiers knew Laker only by sight, and that not always very distinctly. The calls of walk-clerks were such matters of routine that little note was taken of the persons of the clerks themselves, who were called by the names of their firms, if they were called by any names at all. Laker had behaved much as usual, so far as the cashiers could remember, and when finally the

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Eastern Consolidated was left behind, nothing more had been learnt than the chat about Laker's new umbrella.

Hewitt had taken leave of Mr Neal's clerk, and was stepping into a hansom, when he noticed a veiled woman in widow's weeds hailing another hansom a little way behind. He recognized the figure again, and said to the driver: 'Drive fast to Palmer's Tourist Office, but keep your eye on that cab behind, and tell me presently if it is following us.'

The cabman drove off, and after passing one or two turnings, opened the lid above Hewitt's head, and said: 'That there other keb *is* a-follerin' us, sir, an' keepin' about even distance all along.'

'All right; that's what I wanted to know. Palmer's now.'

At Palmer's the clerk who had attended to Laker remembered him very well and described him. He also remembered the wallet, and *thought* he remembered the umbrella—was practically sure of it, in fact, upon reflection. He had no record of the name given, but remembered it distinctly to be Laker. As a matter of fact, names were never asked in such a transaction, but in this case Laker appeared to be ignorant of the usual procedure, as well as in a great hurry, and asked for the ticket and gave his name all in one breath, probably assuming that the name would be required.

Hewitt got back to his cab, and started for Charing Cross. The cabman once more lifted the lid and informed him that the hansom with the veiled woman in it was again following, having waited while Hewitt had visited Palmer's. At Charing Cross Hewitt discharged his cab and walked straight to the lost property office. The man in charge knew him very well, for his business had carried him there frequently before.

'I fancy an umbrella was lost in the station yesterday,' Hewitt said. 'It was a new umbrella, silk, with a gnarled

gorse-root handle and two silver bands, something like this sketch. There was a monogram on the lower band—"C. W. L." were the letters. Has it been brought here?"

'There was two or three yesterday,' the man said; 'let's see.' He took the sketch and retired to a corner of his room.

'Oh, yes—here it is, I think; isn't this it? Do you claim it?'

'Well, not exactly that, but I think I'll take a look at it, if you'll let me. By the way, I see it's rolled up. Was it found like that?'

'No; the chap rolled it up what found it—porter he was. It's a fad of his, rolling up umbrellas close and neat, and he's rather proud of it. He often looks as though he'd like to take a man's umbrella away and roll it up for him when it's a bit clumsy done. Rum fad, eh?'

'Yes; everybody has his little fad, though. Where was this found—close by here?'

'Yes, sir; just there, almost opposite this window, in the little corner.'

'About two o'clock?'

'Ah, about that time, more or less.'

Hewitt took the umbrella up, unfastened the band, and shook the silk out loose. Then he opened it, and as he did so a small scrap of paper fell from inside it. Hewitt pounced on it like lightning. Then, after examining the umbrella thoroughly, inside and out, he handed it back to the man, who had not observed the incident of the scrap of paper.

'That will do, thanks,' he said. 'I only wanted to take a peep at it—just a small matter connected with a little case of mine. Good-morning.'

He turned suddenly and saw, gazing at him with a terrified expression from a door behind, the face of the woman who had followed him in the cab. The veil was lifted, and he caught but a mere glance of the face ere it was suddenly withdrawn. He stood for a moment to

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allow the woman time to retreat, and then left the station and walked toward his office, close by.

Scarcely thirty yards along the Strand he met Plummer.

'I'm going to make some much closer inquiries all down the line as far as Dover,' Plummer said. 'They wire from Calais that they have no clue as yet, and I mean to make quite sure, if I can, that Laker hasn't quietly slipped off the line somewhere between here and Dover. There's one very peculiar thing,' Plummer added confidentially. 'Did you see the two women who were waiting to see a member of the firm at Liddle, Neal & Liddle's?'

'Yes. Laker's mother and his *fiancée*, I was told.'

'That's right. Well, do you know that girl—Shaw her name is—has been shadowing me ever since I left the Bank. Of course I spotted it from the beginning—these amateurs don't know how to follow anybody—and, as a matter of fact, she's just inside that jeweller's shop door behind me now, pretending to look at the things in the window. But it's odd, isn't it?'

'Well,' Hewitt replied, 'of course it's not a thing to be neglected. If you'll look very carefully at the corner of Villiers Street, without appearing to stare, I think you will possibly observe some signs of Laker's mother. She's shadowing *me*.'

Plummer looked casually in the direction indicated, and then immediately turned his eyes in another direction.

'I see her,' he said; 'she's just taking a look round the corner. That's a thing not to be ignored. Of course, the Laker's house is being watched—we set a man on it at once, yesterday. But I'll put some one on now to watch Miss Shaw's place too. I'll telephone through to Liddle's—probably they'll be able to say where it is. And the women themselves must be watched, too. As a matter of fact, I had a notion that Laker wasn't alone in it. And it's just possible, you know, that he has sent an accomplice

off with his tourist ticket to lead us a dance while he looks after himself in another direction. Have you done anything?’

‘Well,’ Hewitt replied, with a faint reproduction of the secretive smile with which Plummer had met an inquiry of his earlier in the morning, ‘I’ve been to the station here, and I’ve found Laker’s umbrella in the lost property office.’

‘Oh! Then probably he *has* gone. I’ll bear that in mind, and perhaps have a word with the lost property man.’

Plummer made for the station and Hewitt for his office. He mounted the stairs and reached his door just as I myself, who had been disappointed in not finding him in, was leaving. I had called with the idea of taking Hewitt to lunch with me at my club, but he declined lunch. ‘I have an important case in hand,’ he said. ‘Look here, Brett. See this scrap of paper. You know the types of the different newspapers—which is this?’

He handed me a small piece of paper. It was part of a cutting containing an advertisement, which had been torn in half.

oast. You 1st. Then to-
3rd L. No.197 red bl. straight
time.

‘I *think*,’ I said, ‘this is from the *Daily Chronicle*, judging by the paper. It is plainly from the “agony column”, but all the papers use pretty much the same type for these advertisements, except the *Times*. If it were not torn I could tell you at once, because the *Chronicle* columns are rather narrow.’

‘Never mind—I’ll send for them all.’ He rang, and sent Kerrett for a copy of each morning paper of the previous day. Then he took from a large wardrobe cupboard a decent but well-worn and rather roughened tall hat. Also a coat a little worn and shiny on the collar. He exchanged

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these for his own hat and coat, and then substituted an old necktie for his own clean white one, and encased his legs in mud-spotted leggings. This done, he produced a very large and thick pocket-book, fastened by a broad elastic band, and said, 'Well, what do you think of this? Will it do for Queen's taxes, or sanitary inspection, or the gas, or the water-supply?'

'Very well indeed, I should say,' I replied. 'What's the case?'

'Oh, I'll tell you all about that when it's over—no time now. Oh, here you are, Kerrett. By the bye, Kerrett, I'm going out presently by the back way. Wait for about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after I am gone, and then just go across the road and speak to that lady in black, with the veil, who is waiting in that little foot-passage opposite. Say Mr Martin Hewitt sends his compliments, and he advises her not to wait, as he has already left his office by another door, and has been gone some little time. That's all; it would be a pity to keep the poor woman waiting all day for nothing. Now the papers. *Daily News*, *Standard*, *Telegraph*, *Chronicle*—yes, here it is, in the *Chronicle*.'

The whole advertisement read thus:

YOB.—H.R. Shop roast. You 1st. Then to-night. 02. 2nd top 3rd L. No.197 red bl. straight mon. One at a time.

'What's this,' I asked, 'a cryptogram?'

'I'll see,' Hewitt answered. 'But I won't tell you anything about it till afterwards, so you get your lunch. Kerrett, bring the directory.'

This was all I actually saw of this case myself, and I have written the rest in its proper order from Hewitt's information, as I have written some other cases entirely.

To resume at the point where, for the time, I lost sight of the matter. Hewitt left by the back way and stopped an empty cab as it passed. 'Abney Park Cemetery' was his direction to the driver. In little more than twenty minutes the cab was branching off down the Essex Road on its way to Stoke Newington, and in twenty minutes more Hewitt stopped it in Church Street, Stoke Newington. He walked through a street or two, and then down another, the houses of which he scanned carefully as he passed. Opposite one which stood by itself he stopped, and, making a pretence of consulting and arranging his large pocket-book, he took a good look at the house. It was rather larger, neater, and more pretentious than the others in the street, and it had a natty little coach-house just visible up the side entrance. There were red blinds hung with heavy lace in the front windows, and behind one of these blinds Hewitt was able to catch the glint of a heavy gas chandelier.

He stepped briskly up the front steps and knocked sharply at the door. 'Mr Merston?' he asked, pocket-book in hand, when a neat parlourmaid opened the door.

'Yes.'

'Ah!' Hewitt stepped into the hall and pulled off his hat; 'it's only the meter. There's been a deal of gas running away somewhere here, and I'm just looking to see if the meters are right. Where is it?'

The girl hesitated. 'I'll—I'll ask master,' she said.

'Very well. I don't want to take it away, you know—only to give it a tap or two, and so on.'

The girl retired to the back of the hall, and without taking her eyes off Martin Hewitt, gave his message to some invisible person in a back room, whence came a growling reply of 'All right'.

Hewitt followed the girl to the basement, apparently looking straight before him, but in reality taking in every

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detail of the place. The gas meter was in a very large lumber cupboard under the kitchen stairs. The girl opened the door and lit a candle. The meter stood on the floor, which was littered with hampers and boxes and odd sheets of brown paper. But a thing that at once arrested Hewitt's attention was a garment of some sort of bright blue cloth, with large brass buttons, which was lying in a tumbled heap in a corner, and appeared to be the only thing in the place that was not covered with dust. Nevertheless, Hewitt took no apparent notice of it, but stooped down and solemnly tapped the meter three times with his pencil, and listened with great gravity, placing his ear to the top. Then he shook his head and tapped again. At length he said:

'It's a bit doubtful. I'll just get you to light the gas in the kitchen a moment. Keep your hand to the burner, and when I call out shut it off *at once*; see?'

The girl turned and entered the kitchen, and Hewitt immediately seized the blue coat—for a coat it was. It had a dull red piping in the seams, and was of the swallow-tail pattern—livery coat, in fact. He held it for a moment before him, examining its pattern and colour, and then rolled it up and flung it again into the corner.

'Right!' he called to the servant. 'Shut off!'

The girl emerged from the kitchen as he left the cupboard.

'Well,' she asked, 'are you satisfied now?'

'Quite satisfied, thank you,' Hewitt replied.

'Is it all right?' she continued, jerking her hand toward the cupboard.

'Well, no, it isn't; there's something wrong there, and I'm glad I came. You can tell Mr Merston, if you like, that I expect his gas bill will be a good deal less next quarter.' And there was a suspicion of a chuckle in Hewitt's voice as he crossed the hall to leave. For a gas inspector is

pleased when he finds at length what he has been searching for.

Things had fallen out better than Hewitt had dared to expect. He saw the key of the whole mystery in that blue coat; for it was the uniform coat of the hall porters at one of the banks that he had visited in the morning, though which one he could not for the moment remember. He entered the nearest post-office and despatched a telegram to Plummer, giving certain directions and asking the inspector to meet him; then he hailed the first available cab and hurried toward the City.

At Lombard Street he alighted, and looked in at the door of each bank till he came to Buller, Clayton, Ladds & Co.'s. This was the bank he wanted. In the other banks the hall porters wore mulberry coats, brick-dust coats, brown coats, and what not, but here, behind the ladders and scaffold poles which obscured the entrance, he could see a man in a blue coat, with dull red piping and brass buttons. He sprang up the steps, pushed open the inner swing door, and finally satisfied himself by a closer view of the coat, to the wearer's astonishment. Then he regained the pavement and walked the whole length of the bank premises in front, afterwards turning up the paved passage at the side, deep in thought. The bank had no windows or doors on the side next the court, and the two adjoining houses were old and supported in place by wooden shores. Both were empty, and a great board announced that tenders would be received in a month's time for the purchase of the old materials of which they were constructed; also that some part of the site would be let on a long building lease.

Hewitt looked up at the grimy fronts of the old buildings. The windows were crusted thick with dirt—all except the bottom window of the house nearer the bank, which was fairly clean, and seemed to have been quite lately washed.

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The door, too, of this house was cleaner than that of the other, though the paint was worn. Hewitt reached and fingered a hook driven into the left-hand doorpost about six feet from the ground. It was new, and not at all rusted; also a tiny splinter had been displaced when the hook was driven in, and clean wood showed at the spot.

Having observed these things, Hewitt stepped back and read at the bottom of the big board the name, 'Winsor & Weekes, Surveyors and Auctioneers, Abchurch Lane'. Then he stepped into Lombard Street.

Two hansoms pulled up near the post-office, and out of the first stepped Inspector Plummer and another man. This man and the two who alighted from the second hansom were unmistakably plain-clothes constables—their air, gait, and boots proclaimed it.

'What's all this?' demanded Plummer, as Hewitt approached.

'You'll soon see, I think. But, first, have you put the watch on No. 197, Hackworth Road?'

'Yes; nobody will get away from there alone.'

'Very good. I am going into Abchurch Lane for a few minutes. Leave your men out here, but just go round into the court by Buller, Clayton & Ladds's, and keep your eye on the first door on the left. I think we'll find something soon. Did you get rid of Miss Shaw?'

'No, she's behind now, and Mrs Laker's with her. They met in the Strand, and came after us in another cab. Rare fun, eh! They think we're pretty green! It's quite handy, too. So long as they keep behind me it saves all trouble of watching *them*.' And Inspector Plummer chuckled and winked.

'Very good. You don't mind keeping your eye on that door, do you? I'll be back very soon,' and with that Hewitt turned off into Abchurch Lane.

At Winsor & Weekes's information was not difficult to

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obtain. The houses were destined to come down very shortly, but a week or so ago an office and a cellar in one of them was let temporarily to a Mr Westley. He brought no references; indeed, as he paid a fortnight's rent in advance, he was not asked for any, considering the circumstances of the case. He was opening a London branch for a large firm of cider merchants, he said, and just wanted a rough office and a cool cellar to store samples in for a few weeks till the permanent premises were ready. There was another key, and no doubt the premises might be entered if there were any special need for such a course. Martin Hewitt gave such excellent reasons that Winsor & Weekes's managing clerk immediately produced the key and accompanied Hewitt to the spot.

'I think you'd better have your men handy,' Hewitt remarked to Plummer when they reached the door, and a whistle quickly brought the men over.

The key was inserted in the lock and turned, but the door would not open; the bolt was fastened at the bottom. Hewitt stooped and looked under the door.

'It's a drop bolt,' he said. 'Probably the man who left last let it fall loose, and then banged the door, so that it fell into its place. I must try my best with a wire or a piece of string.'

A wire was brought, and with some manoeuvring Hewitt contrived to pass it round the bolt, and lift it little by little, steadying it with the blade of a pocket-knife. When at length the bolt was raised out of the hole, the knife-blade was slipped under it, and the door swung open.

They entered. The door of the little office just inside stood open, but in the office there was nothing, except a board a couple of feet long in a corner. Hewitt stepped across and lifted this, turning it downward face toward Plummer. On it, in fresh white paint on a black ground, were painted the words

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“BULLER, CLAYTON, LADDS & CO.,

TEMPORARY ENTRANCE.”

Hewitt turned to Winsor & Weekes's clerk and asked, 'The man who took this room called himself Westley, didn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Youngish man, clean-shaven, and well-dressed?'

'Yes, he was.'

'I fancy,' Hewitt said, turning to Plummer, 'I fancy an old friend of yours is in this—Mr Sam Gunter.'

'What, the "Hoxton Yob"?''

'I think it's possible he's been Mr Westley for a bit, and somebody else for another bit. But let's come to the cellar.'

Winsor & Weekes's clerk led the way down a steep flight of steps into a dark underground corridor, wherein they lighted their way with many successive matches. Soon the cellar corridor made a turn to the right, and as the party passed the turn, there came from the end of the passage before them a fearful yell.

'Help! help! Open the door! I'm going mad—mad! O my God!'

And there was a sound of desperate beating from the inside of the cellar door at the extreme end. The men stopped, startled.

'Come,' said Hewitt, 'more matches!' and he rushed to the door. It was fastened with a bar and padlock.

'Let me out, for God's sake!' came the voice, sick and hoarse, from the inside. 'Let me out!'

'All right!' Hewitt shouted. 'We have come for you. Wait a moment.'

The voice sank into a sort of sobbing croon, and Hewitt tried several keys from his own bunch on the padlock. None fitted. He drew from his pocket the wire he had used

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for the bolt of the front door, straightened it out, and made a sharp bend at the end.

'Hold a match close,' he ordered shortly, and one of the men obeyed. Three or four attempts were necessary, and several different bendings of the wire were effected, but in the end Hewitt picked the lock, and flung open the door.

From within a ghastly figure fell forward among them fainting, and knocked out the matches.

'Hullo!' cried Plummer. 'Hold up! Who are you?'

'Let's get him up into the open,' said Hewitt. 'He can't tell you who he is for a bit, but I believe he's Laker.'

'Laker! What, here?'

'I think so. Steady up the steps. Don't bump him. He's pretty sore already, I expect.'

Truly the man was a pitiable sight. His hair and face were caked in dust and blood, and his finger-nails were torn and bleeding. Water was sent for at once, and brandy.

'Well,' said Plummer hazily, looking first at the unconscious prisoner and then at Hewitt, 'but what about the swag?'

'You'll have to find that yourself,' Hewitt replied. 'I think my share of the case is about finished. I only act for the Guarantee Society, you know, and if Laker's proved innocent——'

'Innocent! How?'

'Well, this is what took place, as near as I can figure it. You'd better undo his collar, I think'—this to the men. 'What I believe has happened is this. There has been a very clever and carefully prepared conspiracy here, and Laker has not been the criminal, but the victim.'

'Been robbed himself, you mean? But how? Where?'

'Yesterday morning, before he had been to more than three banks—here, in fact.'

'But then how? You're all wrong. We *know* he made

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the whole round, and did all the collection. And then Palmer's office, and all, and the umbrella; why—'

The man lay still unconscious. 'Don't raise his head,' Hewitt said. 'And one of you had best fetch a doctor. He's had a terrible shock.' Then turning to Plummer he went on, 'As to *how* they managed the job, I'll tell you what I think. First it struck some very clever person that a deal of money might be got by robbing a walk-clerk from a bank. This clever person was one of a clever gang of thieves—perhaps the Hoxton Row gang, as I think I hinted. Now you know quite as well as I do that such a gang will spend any amount of time over a job that promises a big haul, and that for such a job they can always command the necessary capital. There are many most respectable persons living in good style in the suburbs whose chief business lies in financing such ventures, and taking the chief share of the proceeds. Well, this is their plan, carefully and intelligently carried out. They watch Laker, observe the round he takes, and his habits. They find that there is only one of the clerks with whom he does business that he is much acquainted with, and that this clerk is in a bank which is commonly second in Laker's round. The sharpest man among them—and I don't think there's a man in London could do this as well as young Sam Gunter—studies Laker's dress and habits just as an actor studies a character. They take this office and cellar, as we have seen, *because it is next door to a bank whose front entrance is being altered*—a fact which Laker must know from his daily visits. The smart man—Gunter, let us say, and I have other reasons for believing it to be he—makes up precisely like Laker, false moustache, dress, and everything, and waits here with the rest of the gang. One of the gang is dressed in a blue coat with brass buttons, like a hall-porter in Buller's bank. Do you see?'

'Yes, I think so. It's pretty clear now.'

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'A confederate watches at the top of the court, and the moment Laker turns in from Cornhill—having already been, mind, at the only bank where he was so well known that the disguised thief would not have passed muster—as soon as he turns in from Cornhill, I say, a signal is given, and that board'—pointing to that with the white letters—'is hung on the hook in the doorpost. The sham porter stands beside it, and as Laker approaches says, "This way in, sir, this morning. The front way's shut for the alterations". Laker suspecting nothing, and supposing that the firm have made a temporary entrance through the empty house, enters. He is seized when well along the corridor, the board is taken down and the door shut. Probably he is stunned by a blow on the head—see the blood now. They take his wallet and all the cash he has already collected. Gunter takes the wallet and also the umbrella, since it has Laker's initials, and is therefore distinctive. He simply completes the walk in the character of Laker, beginning with Buller, Clayton & Ladds's just round the corner. It is nothing but routine work, which is quickly done, and nobody notices him particularly—it is the bills they examine. Meanwhile this unfortunate fellow is locked up in the cellar here, right at the end of the underground corridor, where he can never make himself heard in the street, and where next him are only the empty cellars of the deserted house next door. The thieves shut the front door and vanish. The rest is plain. Gunter, having completed the round, and bagged some £15,000 or more, spends a few pounds in a tourist ticket at Palmer's as a blind, being careful to give Laker's name. He leaves the umbrella at Charing Cross in a conspicuous place right opposite the lost property office, where it is sure to be seen, and so completes his false trail.'

'Then who are the people at 197, Hackworth Road?'

'The capitalist lives there—the financier, and probably

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the directing spirit of the whole thing. Merston's the name he goes by there, and I've no doubt he cuts a very imposing figure in chapel every Sunday. He'll be worth picking up—this isn't the first thing he's been in, I'll warrant.'

'But—but what about Laker's mother and Miss Shaw?'

'Well, what? The poor women are nearly out of their minds with terror and shame, that's all, but though they may think Laker a criminal, they'll never desert him. They've been following us about with a feeble, vague sort of hope of being able to baffle us in some way or help him if we caught him, or something, poor things. Did you ever hear of a real woman who'd desert a son or a lover merely because he was a criminal? But here's the doctor. When he's attended to him will you let your men take Laker home? I must hurry and report to the Guarantee Society, I think.'

'But,' said the perplexed Plummer, 'where did you get your clue? You must have had a tip from some one, you know—you can't have done it by clairvoyance. What gave you the tip?'

'The *Daily Chronicle*.'

'The what?'

'The *Daily Chronicle*. Just take a look at the "agony column" in yesterday morning's issue, and read the message to "Yob"—to Gunter, in fact. That's all.'

By this time a cab was waiting in Lombard Street, and two of Plummer's men, under the doctor's directions, carried Laker to it. No sooner, however, were they in the court than the two watching women threw themselves hysterically upon Laker, and it was long before they could be persuaded that he was not being taken to gaol. The mother shrieked aloud, 'My boy—my boy! Don't take him! Oh, don't take him! They've killed my boy! Look at his head—oh, his head!' and wrestled desperately with the men, while Hewitt attempted to soothe her, and

promised to allow her to go in the cab with her son if she would only be quiet. The younger woman made no noise, but she held one of Laker's limp hands in both hers.

Hewitt and I dined together that evening, and he gave me a full account of the occurrences which I have here set down. Still, when he was finished I was not able to see clearly by what process of reasoning he had arrived at the conclusions that gave him the key to the mystery, nor did I understand the 'agony column' message, and I said so.

'In the beginning,' Hewitt explained, 'the thing that struck me as curious was the fact that Laker was said to have given his own name at Palmer's in buying his ticket. Now, the first thing the greenest and newest criminal thinks of is changing his name, so that the giving of his own name seemed unlikely to begin with. Still, he *might* have made such a mistake, as Plummer suggested when he said that criminals usually make a mistake somewhere—as they do, in fact. Still, it was the least likely mistake I could think of—especially as he actually didn't wait to be asked for his name, but blurted it out when it wasn't really wanted. And it was conjoined with another rather curious mistake, or what would have been a mistake, if the thief were Laker. Why should he conspicuously display his wallet—such a distinctive article—for the clerk to see and note? Why rather had he not got rid of it before showing himself? Suppose it should be somebody personating Laker? In any case I determined not to be prejudiced by what I had heard of Laker's betting. A man may bet without being a thief.

'But, again, supposing it *were* Laker? Might he not have given his name, and displayed his wallet, and so on, while buying a ticket for France, in order to draw pursuit after himself in that direction while he made off in another, in another name, and disguised? Each supposition was

The Case of Laker, Absconded

plausible. And, in either case, it might happen that whoever was laying this trail would probably lay it a little farther. Charing Cross was the next point, and there I went. I already had it from Plummer that Laker had not been recognized there. Perhaps the trail had been laid in some other manner. Something left behind with Laker's name on it, perhaps? I at once thought of the umbrella with his monogram, and, making a long shot, asked for it at the lost property office, as you know. The guess was lucky. In the umbrella, as you know, I found the scrap of paper. That, I judged, had fallen in from the hand of the man carrying the umbrella. He had torn the paper in half in order to fling it away, and one piece had fallen into the loosely flapping umbrella. It is a thing that will often happen with an omnibus ticket, as you may have noticed. Also, it was proved that the umbrella *was* unrolled when found, and rolled immediately after. So here was a piece of paper dropped by the person who had brought the umbrella to Charing Cross and left it. I got the whole advertisement, as you remember, and I studied it. "Yob" is back-slang for "boy", and is often used in nicknames to denote a young smooth-faced thief. Gunter, the man I suspect, as a matter of fact, is known as the "Hoxton Yob". The message, then, was addressed to some one known by such a nickname. Next, "H.R. shop roast". Now, in thieves' slang, to "roast" a thing or a person is to watch it or him. They call any place a shop—notably, a thieves' den. So that this meant that some resort—perhaps the "Hoxton Row shop"—was watched. "You 1st then to-night" would be clearer, perhaps, when the rest was understood. I thought a little over the rest, and it struck me that it must be a direction to some other house, since one was warned of as being watched. Besides, there was the number, 197, and "red bl.", which would be extremely likely to mean "red blinds", by way of clearly distinguishing

the house. And then the plan of the thing was plain. You have noticed, probably, that the map of London which accompanies the Post Office Directory is divided, for convenience of reference, into numbered squares?

‘Yes. The squares are denoted by letters along the top margin and figures down the side. So that if you consult the directory, and find a place marked as being in D 5, for instance, you find vertical divisions D, and run your finger down it till it intersects horizontal division 5, and there you are.’

‘Precisely. I got my Post Office Directory, and looked for “0 2”. It was in North London, and took in parts of Abney Park Cemetery and Clissold Park; “2nd top” was the next sign. Very well, I counted the second street intersecting the top of the square—counting, in the usual way, from the left. That was Lordship Road. Then “3rd L”. From the point where Lordship Road crossed the top of the square, I ran my finger down the road till it came to “3rd L”, or, in other words, the third turning on the left—Hackworth Road. So there we were, unless my guesses were altogether wrong. “Straight mon” probably meant “straight moniker”—that is to say, the proper name, a thief’s *real* name, in contradistinction to that he may assume. I turned over the directory till I found Hackworth Road, and found that No. 197 was inhabited by a Mr Merston. From the whole thing I judged this. There was to have been a meeting at the “H.R. shop”, but that was found, at the last moment, to be watched by the police for some purpose, so that another appointment was made for this house in the suburbs. “You 1st. Then to-night”—the person addressed was to come first, and the others in the evening. They were to ask for the householder’s “straight moniker”—Mr Merston. And they were to come one at a time.

‘Now, then, what was this? What theory would fit it?

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Suppose this were a robbery, directed from afar by the advertiser. Suppose, on the day before the robbery, it was found that the place fixed for division of spoils were watched. Suppose that the principal thereupon advertised (as had already been agreed in case of emergency) in these terms. The principal in the actual robbery—the “Yob” addressed—was to go first with the booty. The others were to come after, one at a time. Anyway, the thing was good enough to follow a little further, and I determined to try No. 197 Hackworth Road. I have told you what I found there, and how it opened my eyes. I went, of course, merely on chance, to see what I might chance to see. But luck favoured, and I happened on that coat—brought back rolled up, on the evening after the robbery, doubtless by the thief who had used it, and flung carelessly into the handiest cupboard. *That* was this gang’s mistake.’

‘Well, I congratulate you,’ I said. ‘I hope they’ll catch the rascals.’

‘I rather think they will, now they know where to look. They can scarcely miss Merston, anyway. There has been very little to go upon in this case, but I stuck to the thread, however slight, and it brought me through. The rest of the case, of course, is Plummer’s. It was a peculiarity of my commission that I could equally well fulfil it by catching the man with all the plunder, or by proving him innocent. Having done the latter, my work was at an end, but I left it where Plummer will be able to finish the job handsomely.’

Plummer did. Sam Gunter, Merston, and one accomplice were taken—the first and last were well known to the police—and were identified by Laker. Merston, as Hewitt had suspected, had kept the lion’s share for himself, so that altogether, with what was recovered from him and the other two, nearly £11,000 was saved for Messrs Liddle, Neal & Liddle. Merston, when taken, was in the act of

packing up to take a holiday abroad, and there cash his notes, which were found, neatly packed in separate thousands, in his portmanteau. As Hewitt had predicted, his gas bill *was* considerably less next quarter, for less than half-way through it he began a term in gaol.

As for Laker, he was reinstated, of course, with an increase of salary by way of compensation for his broken head. He had passed a terrible twenty-six hours in the cellar, unfed and unheard. Several times he had become insensible, and again and again he had thrown himself madly against the door, shouting and tearing at it, till he fell back exhausted, with broken nails and bleeding fingers. For some hours before the arrival of his rescuers he had been sitting in a sort of stupor, from which he was suddenly aroused by the sound of voices and footsteps. He was in bed for a week, and required a rest of a month in addition before he could resume his duties. Then he was quietly lectured by Mr Neal as to betting, and, I believe, dropped that practice in consequence. I am told that he is 'at the counter' now—a considerable promotion.

III

The Duchess of Wiltshire's Diamonds

Guy Boothby

To the reflective mind the rapidity with which the inhabitants of the world's greatest city seize upon a new name or idea, and familiarize themselves with it, can scarcely prove otherwise than astonishing. As an illustration of my meaning let me take the case of Klimo—the now famous private detective, who has won for himself the right to be considered as great as Lecocq, or even the late lamented Sherlock Holmes.

Up to a certain morning London had never even heard his name, nor had it the remotest notion as to who or what he might be. It was as sublimely ignorant and careless on the subject as the inhabitants of Kamtchatka or Peru. Within twenty-four hours, however, the whole aspect of the case was changed. The man, woman, or child who had not seen his posters, or heard his name, was counted an ignoramus unworthy of intercourse with human beings.

Princes became familiar with it as their trains bore them to Windsor to luncheon with the Queen; the nobility noticed and commented upon it as they drove about the town; merchants, and business men generally, read it as they made their ways by omnibus or underground, to

their various shops and counting-houses; street boys called each other by it as a nickname; music hall artists introduced it into their patter, while it was even rumoured that the Stock Exchange itself had paused in the full flood tide of business to manufacture a riddle on the subject.

That Klimo made his profession pay him well was certain, first from the fact that his advertisements must have cost a good round sum, and, second, because he had taken a mansion in Belverton Street, Park Lane, next door to Porchester House, where, to the dismay of that aristocratic neighbourhood, he advertised that he was prepared to receive and be consulted by his clients. The invitation was responded to with alacrity, and from that day forward, between the hours of twelve and two, the pavement upon the north side of the street was lined with carriages, every one containing some person desirous of testing the great man's skill.

I must here explain that I have narrated all this in order to show the state of affairs in Belverton Street and Park Lane when Simon Carne arrived, or was supposed to arrive, in England. If my memory serves me correctly, it was on Wednesday, the 3rd of May, that the Earl of Amberley drove to Victoria to meet and welcome the man whose acquaintance he had made in India under such peculiar circumstances, and under the spell of whose fascination he and his family had fallen so completely.

Reaching the station, his lordship descended from his carriage, and made his way to the platform set apart for the reception of the Continental express. He walked with a jaunty air, and seemed to be on the best of terms with himself and the world in general. How little he suspected the existence of the noose into which he was so innocently running his head!

As if out of compliment to his arrival, the train put in an appearance within a few moments of his reaching the

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platform. He immediately placed himself in such a position that he could make sure of seeing the man he wanted, and waited patiently until he should come in sight. Carne, however, was not among the first batch; indeed, the majority of passengers had passed before his lordship caught sight of him.

One thing was very certain, however great the crush might have been, it would have been difficult to mistake Carne's figure. The man's infirmity and the peculiar beauty of his face rendered him easily recognisable. Possibly, after his long sojourn in India, he found the morning cold, for he wore a long fur coat, the collar of which he had turned up round his ears, thus making a fitting frame for his delicate face. On seeing Lord Amberley he hastened forward to greet him.

'This is most kind and friendly of you,' he said, as he shook the other by the hand. 'A fine day and Lord Amberley to meet me. One could scarcely imagine a better welcome.'

As he spoke, one of his Indian servants approached and salaamed before him. He gave him an order, and received an answer in Hindustani, whereupon he turned again to Lord Amberley.

'You may imagine how anxious I am to see my new dwelling,' he said. 'My servant tells me that my carriage is here, so may I hope that you will drive back with me and see for yourself how I am likely to be lodged?'

'I shall be delighted,' said Lord Amberley, who was longing for the opportunity, and they accordingly went out into the station yard together to discover a brougham, drawn by two magnificent horses, and with Nur Ali, in all the glory of white raiment and crested turban, on the box, waiting to receive them. His lordship dismissed his Victoria, and when Jowur Singh had taken his place beside his fellow servant upon the box, the carriage rolled out of the station yard in the direction of Hyde Park.

'I trust her ladyship is quite well,' said Simon Carne politely, as they turned into Gloucester Place.

'Excellently well, thank you,' replied his lordship. 'She bade me welcome you to England in her name as well as my own, and I was to say that she is looking forward to seeing you.'

'She is most kind, and I shall do myself the honour of calling upon her as soon as circumstances will permit,' answered Carne. 'I beg you will convey my best thanks to her for her thought of me.'

While these polite speeches were passing between them they were rapidly approaching a large hoarding, on which was displayed a poster setting forth the name of the now famous detective, Klimo.

Simon Carne, leaning forward, studied it, and when they had passed, turned to his friend again.

'At Victoria and on all the hoardings we meet I see an enormous placard, bearing the word "Klimo". Pray, what does it mean?'

His lordship laughed.

'You are asking a question which, a month ago, was on the lips of nine out of every ten Londoners. It is only within the last fortnight that we have learned who and what "Klimo" is.'

'And pray what is he?'

'Well, the explanation is very simple. He is neither more nor less than a remarkably astute private detective, who has succeeded in attracting notice in such a way that half London has been induced to patronize him. I have had no dealings with the man myself. But a friend of mine, Lord Orpington, has been the victim of a most audacious burglary, and, the police having failed to solve the mystery, he has called Klimo in. We shall therefore see what he can do before many days are past. But, there, I expect you will soon know more about him than any of us.'

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‘Indeed! And why?’

‘For the simple reason that he has taken No. 1, Belverton Terrace, the house adjoining your own, and sees his clients there.’

Simon Carne pursed up his lips, and appeared to be considering something.

‘I trust he will not prove a nuisance,’ he said at last. ‘The agents who found me the house should have acquainted me with the fact. Private detectives, on however large a scale, scarcely strike one as the most desirable of neighbours—particularly for a man who is so fond of quiet as myself.’

At this moment they were approaching their destination. As the carriage passed Belverton Street and pulled up, Lord Amberley pointed to a long line of vehicles standing before the detective’s door.

‘You can see for yourself something of the business he does,’ he said. ‘Those are the carriages of his clients, and it is probable that twice as many have arrived on foot.’

‘I shall certainly speak to the agent on the subject,’ said Carne, with a shadow of annoyance upon his face. ‘I consider the fact of this man’s being so close to me a serious drawback to the house.’

Jowur Singh here descended from the box and opened the door in order that his master and his guest might alight, while portly Ram Gafur, the butler, came down the steps and salaamed before them with Oriental obsequiousness. Carne greeted his domestics with kindly condescension, and then, accompanied by the ex-Viceroy, entered his new abode.

‘I think you may congratulate yourself upon having secured one of the most desirable residences in London,’ said his lordship ten minutes or so later, when they had explored the principal rooms.

‘I am very glad to hear you say so,’ said Carne. ‘I trust

your lordship will remember that you will always be welcome in the house as long as I am its owner.'

'It is very kind of you to say so,' returned Lord Amberley warmly. 'I shall look forward to some months of pleasant intercourse. And now I must be going. Tomorrow, perhaps, if you have nothing better to do, you will give us the pleasure of your company at dinner. Your fame has already gone abroad, and we shall ask one or two nice people to meet you, including my brother and sister-in-law, Lord and Lady Gelpington, Lord and Lady Orpington, and my cousin, the Duchess of Wiltshire, whose interest in china and Indian art, as perhaps you know, is only second to your own.'

'I shall be most glad to come.'

'We may count on seeing you in Eaton Square, then, at eight o'clock?'

'If I am alive you may be sure I shall be there. Must you really go? Then good-bye, and many thanks for meeting me.'

His lordship having left the house, Simon Carne went upstairs to his dressing-room, which it was to be noticed he found without inquiry, and rang the electric bell, beside the fireplace, three times. While he was waiting for it to be answered he stood looking out of the window at the long line of carriages in the street below.

'Everything is progressing admirably,' he said to himself. 'Amberley does not suspect any more than the world in general. As a proof he asks me to dinner tomorrow evening to meet his brother and sister-in-law, two of his particular friends, and above all Her Grace of Wiltshire.'

At this moment the door opened, and his valet, the grave and respectable Belton, entered the room. Carne turned to greet him impatiently.

'Come, come, Belton,' he said, 'we must be quick. It is twenty minutes to twelve, and if we don't hurry, the folk

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next door will become impatient. Have you succeeded in doing what I spoke to you about last night?’

‘I have done everything, sir.’

‘I am glad to hear it. Now lock that door and let us get to work. You can let me have your news while I am dressing.’

Opening one side of a massive wardrobe, that completely filled one end of the room, Belton took from it a number of garments. They included a well-worn velvet coat, a baggy pair of trousers—so old that only a notorious pauper or a millionaire could have afforded to wear them—a flannel waistcoat, a Gladstone collar, a soft silk tie, and a pair of embroidered carpet slippers upon which no old clothes man in the most reckless way of business in Petticoat Lane would have advanced a single halfpenny. Into these he assisted his master to change.

‘Now give me the wig, and unfasten the straps of this hump,’ said Carne, as the other placed the garments just referred to upon a neighbouring chair.

Belton did as he was ordered, and then there happened a thing the like of which no one would have believed. Having unbuckled a strap on either shoulder, and slipped his hand beneath the waistcoat, he withdrew a large *papier-mâché* hump, which he carried away and carefully placed in a drawer of the bureau. Relieved of his burden, Simon Carne stood up as straight and well-made a man as any in Her Majesty’s dominions. The malformation, for which so many, including the Earl and Countess of Amberley, had often pitied him, was nothing but a hoax intended to produce an effect which would permit him additional facilities of disguise.

The hump discarded, and the grey wig fitted carefully to his head in such a manner that not even a pinch of his own curly locks could be seen beneath it, he adorned his cheeks with a pair of *crépu*-hair whiskers, donned the

flannel vest and the velvet coat previously mentioned, slipped his feet in the carpet slippers, placed a pair of smoked glasses upon his nose, and declared himself ready to proceed about his business. The man who would have known him for Simon Carne would have been as astute as, well, shall we say, as the private detective—Klimo himself.

‘It’s on the stroke of twelve,’ he said, as he gave a final glance at himself in the pier-glass above the dressing-table, and arranged his tie to his satisfaction. ‘Should any one call, instruct Ram Gafur to tell them that I have gone out on business, and shall not be back until three o’clock.’

‘Very good, sir.’

‘Now undo the door and let me go in.’

Thus commanded, Belton went across to the large wardrobe which, as I have already said, covered the whole of one side of the room, and opened the middle door. Two or three garments were seen inside suspended on pegs, and these he removed, at the same time pushing towards the right the panel at the rear. When this was done a large aperture in the wall between the two houses was disclosed. Through this door Carne passed, drawing it behind him.

In No. 1, Belverton Terrace, the house occupied by the detective, whose presence in the street Carne seemed to find so objectionable, the entrance thus constructed was covered by the peculiar kind of confessional box in which Klimo invariably sat to receive his clients, the rearmost panels of which opened in the same fashion as those in the wardrobe in the dressing-room. These being pulled aside, he had but to draw them to again after him, take his seat, ring the electric bell to inform his house-keeper that he was ready, and then welcome his clients as quickly as they cared to come.

Punctually at two o’clock the interviews ceased, and Klimo, having reaped an excellent harvest of fees, returned to Porchester House to become Simon Carne once more.

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Possibly it was due to the fact that the Earl and Countess of Amberley were brimming over with his praise, or it may have been the rumour that he was worth as many millions as you have fingers upon your hand that did it; one thing, however, was self evident, within twenty-four hours of the noble earl's meeting him at Victoria Station, Simon Carne was the talk, not only of fashionable, but also of unfashionable London.

That his household were, with one exception, natives of India, that he had paid a rental for Porchester House which ran into five figures, that he was the greatest living authority upon china and Indian art generally, and that he had come over to England in search of a wife, were among the smallest of the *canards* set afloat concerning him.

During dinner next evening Carne put forth every effort to please. He was placed on the right hand of his hostess and next to the Duchess of Wiltshire. To the latter he paid particular attention, and to such good purpose that when the ladies returned to the drawing-room afterwards, Her Grace was full of his praises. They had discussed china of all sorts, Carne had promised her a specimen which she had longed for all her life, but had never been able to obtain, and in return she had promised to show him the quaintly carved Indian casket in which the famous necklace, of which he had, of course, heard, spent most of its time. She would be wearing the jewels in question at her own ball in a week's time, she informed him, and if he would care to see the case when it came from her bankers on that day, she would be only too pleased to show it to him.

As Simon Carne drove home in his luxurious brougham afterwards, he smiled to himself as he thought of the success which was attending his first endeavour. Two of the guests, who were stewards of the Jockey Club, had heard with delight his idea of purchasing a horse, in order

to have an interest in the Derby. While another, on hearing that he desired to become the possessor of a yacht, had offered to propose him for the R.C.Y.C. To crown it all, however, and much better than all, the Duchess of Wiltshire had promised to show him her famous diamonds.

‘But satisfactory as my progress has been hitherto,’ he said to himself, ‘it is difficult to see how I am to get possession of the stones. From what I have been able to discover, they are only brought from the bank on the day the Duchess intends to wear them, and they are taken back by His Grace the morning following.

‘While she has got them on her person it would be manifestly impossible to get them from her. And as, when she takes them off, they are returned to their box and placed in a safe, constructed in the wall of the bedroom adjoining, and which for the occasion is occupied by the butler and one of the under footmen, the only key being in the possession of the Duke himself, it would be equally foolish to hope to appropriate them. In what manner, therefore, I am to become their possessor passes my comprehension. However, one thing is certain, obtained they must be, and the attempt must be made on the night of the ball if possible. In the meantime I’ll set my wits to work upon a plan.’

Next day Simon Carne was the recipient of an invitation to the ball in question, and two days later he called upon the Duchess of Wiltshire, at her residence in Belgrave Square, with a plan prepared. He also took with him the small vase he had promised her four nights before. She received him most graciously, and their talk fell at once into the usual channel. Having examined her collection, and charmed her by means of one or two judicious criticisms, he asked permission to include photographs of certain of her treasures in his forthcoming book, then little by little he skilfully guided the conversation on to the subject of jewels.

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'Since we are discussing gems, Mr Carne,' she said, 'perhaps it would interest you to see my famous necklace. By good fortune I have it in the house now, for the reason that an alteration is being made to one of the clasps by my jewellers.'

'I should like to see it immensely,' answered Carne. 'At one time and another I have had the good fortune to examine the jewels of the leading Indian princes, and I should like to be able to say that I have seen the famous Wiltshire necklace.'

'Then you shall certainly have the honour,' she answered with a smile. 'If you will ring that bell I will send for it.'

Carne rang the bell as requested, and when the butler entered he was given the key of the safe and ordered to bring the case to the drawing-room.

'We must not keep it very long,' she observed while the man was absent. 'It is to be returned to the bank in an hour's time.'

'I am indeed fortunate,' Carne replied, and turned to the description of some curious Indian wood carving, of which he was making a special feature in his book. As he explained, he had collected his illustrations from the doors of Indian temples, from the gateways of palaces, from old brass work, and even from carved chairs and boxes he had picked up in all sorts of odd corners. Her Grace was most interested.

'How strange that you should have mentioned it,' she said. 'If carved boxes have any interest for you, it is possible my jewel case itself may be of use to you. As I think I told you during Lady Amberley's dinner, it came from Benares, and has carved upon it the portraits of nearly every god in the Hindu Pantheon.'

'You raise my curiosity to fever heat,' said Carne.

A few moments later the servant returned, bringing with him a wooden box, about sixteen inches long, by

twelve wide, and eight deep, which he placed upon a table beside his mistress, after which he retired.

'This is the case to which I have just been referring,' said the Duchess, placing her hand on the article in question. 'If you glance at it you will see how exquisitely it is carved.'

Concealing his eagerness with an effort, Simon Carne drew his chair up to the table, and examined the box.

It was with justice she had described it as a work of art. What the wood was of which it was constructed Carne was unable to tell. It was dark and heavy; and, though it was not teak, closely resembled it. It was literally covered with quaint carving, and of its kind was an unique work of art.

'It is most curious and beautiful,' said Carne when he had finished his examination. 'In all my experience I can safely say I have never seen its equal. If you will permit me I should very much like to include a description and an illustration of it in my book.'

'Of course you may do so; I shall be only too delighted,' answered Her Grace. 'If it will help you in your work I shall be glad to lend it to you for a few hours, in order that you may have the illustration made.'

This was exactly what Carne had been waiting for, and he accepted the offer with alacrity.

'Very well, then,' she said. 'On the day of my ball, when it will be brought from the bank again, I will take the necklace out and send the case to you. I must make one proviso, however, and that is that you let me have it back the same day.'

'I will certainly promise to do that,' replied Carne.

'And now let us look inside,' said his hostess.

Choosing a key from a bunch she carried in her pocket, she unlocked the casket, and lifted the lid. Accustomed as Carne had all his life been to the sight of gems, what he then saw before him almost took his breath away. The

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inside of the box, both sides and bottom, was quilted with the softest Russia leather, and on this luxurious couch reposed the famous necklace. The fire of the stones when the light caught them was sufficient to dazzle the eyes, so fierce was it.

As Carne could see, every gem was perfect of its kind, and there were no fewer than three hundred of them. The setting was a fine example of the jeweller's art, and last, but not least, the value of the whole affair was fifty thousand pounds, a mere fleabite to the man who had given it to his wife, but a fortune to any humbler person.

'And now that you have seen my property, what do you think of it?' asked the Duchess as she watched her visitor's face.

'It is very beautiful,' he answered, 'and I do not wonder that you are proud of it. Yes, the diamonds are very fine, but I think it is their abiding place that fascinates me more. Have you any objection to my measuring it?'

'Pray do so, if it is likely to be of any assistance to you,' replied Her Grace.

Carne therefore produced a small ivory rule, ran it over the box, and the figures he thus obtained he jotted down in his pocket-book.

Ten minutes later, when the case had been returned to the safe, he thanked the Duchess for her kindness and took his departure, promising to call in person for the empty case on the morning of the ball.

Reaching home he passed into his study, and, seating himself at his writing table, pulled a sheet of note paper towards him and began to sketch, as well as he could remember it, the box he had seen. Then he leant back in his chair and closed his eyes.

'I have cracked a good many hard nuts in my time,' he said reflectively, 'but never one that seemed so difficult at first sight as this. As far as I see at present, the case

stands as follows: the box will be brought from the bank where it usually reposes to Wiltshire House on the morning of the dance. I shall be allowed to have possession of it, without the stones of course, for a period possibly extending from eleven o'clock in the morning to four or five, at any rate not later than seven, in the evening. After the ball the necklace will be returned to it, when it will be locked up in the safe, over which the butler and a footman will mount guard.

'To get into the room during the night is not only too risky, but physically out of the question; while to rob Her Grace of her treasure during the progress of the dance would be equally impossible. The Duke fetches the casket and takes it back to the bank himself, so that to all intents and purposes I am almost as far off the solution as ever.'

Half an hour went by and found him still seated at his desk, staring at the drawing on the paper, then an hour. The traffic of the streets rolled past the house unheeded. Finally Jowur Singh announced his carriage, and, feeling that an idea might come to him with a change of scene, he set off for a drive in the park.

By this time his elegant mail phaeton, with its magnificent horses and Indian servant on the seat behind, was as well-known as Her Majesty's state equipage, and attracted almost as much attention. To-day, however, the fashionable world noticed that Simon Carne looked pre-occupied. He was still working out his problem, but so far without much success. Suddenly something, no one will ever be able to say what, put an idea into his head. The notion was no sooner born in his brain than he left the park and drove quickly home. Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed before he was back in his study again, and had ordered that Wajib Baksh should be sent to him.

When the man he wanted put in an appearance, Carne

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handed him the paper upon which he had made the drawing of the jewel case.

‘Look at that,’ he said, ‘and tell me what thou seest there.’

‘I see a box,’ answered the man, who by this time was well accustomed to his master’s ways.

‘As thou say’st, it is a box,’ said Carne. ‘The wood is heavy and thick, though what wood it is I do not know. The measurements are upon the paper below. Within, both the sides and bottom are quilted with soft leather, as I have also shown. Think now, Wajib Baksh, for in this case thou wilt need to have all thy wits about thee. Tell me is it in thy power, oh most cunning of all craftsmen, to insert such extra sides within this box that they, being held by a spring, shall lie so snug as not to be noticeable to the ordinary eye? Can it be so arranged that, when the box is locked, they will fall flat upon the bottom, thus covering and holding fast what lies beneath them, and yet making the box appear to the eye as if it were empty. Is it possible for thee to do such a thing?’

Wajib Baksh did not reply for a few moments. His instinct told him what his master wanted, and he was not disposed to answer hastily, for he also saw that his reputation as the most cunning craftsman in India was at stake.

‘If the Heaven-born will permit me the night for thought,’ he said at last, ‘I will come to him when he rises from his bed and tell him what I can do, and he can then give his orders as it pleases him.’

‘Very good,’ said Carne. ‘Then to-morrow morning I shall expect thy report. Let the work be good, and there will be many rupees for thee to touch in return. As to the lock and the way it shall act, let that be the concern of Hiram Singh.’

Wajib Baksh salaamed and withdrew, and Simon Carne for the time being dismissed the matter from his mind.

Guy Boothby

Next morning, while he was dressing, Belton reported that the two artificers desired an interview with him. He ordered them to be admitted, and forthwith they entered the room. It was noticeable that Wajib Baksh carried in his hand a heavy box, which, upon Carne's motioning him to do so, he placed upon the table.

'Have ye thought over the matter?' he asked, seeing that the men waited for him to speak.

'We have thought of it,' replied Hiram Singh, who always acted as spokesman for the pair. 'If the Presence will deign to look, he will see that we have made a box of the size and shape such as he drew upon the paper.'

'Yes, it is certainly a good copy,' said Carne condescendingly, after he had examined it.

Wajib Baksh showed his white teeth in appreciation of the compliment, and Hiram Singh drew closer to the table.

'And now, if the Sahib will open it, he will in his wisdom be able to tell if it resembles the other that he has in his mind.'

Carne opened the box as requested, and discovered that the interior was an exact counterfeit of the Duchess of Wiltshire's jewel case, even to the extent of the quilted leather lining which had been the other's principal feature. He admitted that the likeness was all that could be desired.

'As he is satisfied,' said Hiram Singh, 'it may be that the Protector of the Poor will deign to try an experiment with it. See, heré is a comb. Let it be placed in the box, so—now he will see what he will see.'

The broad, silver-backed comb, lying upon his dressing-table, was placed on the bottom of the box, the lid was closed, and the key turned in the lock. The case being securely fastened, Hiram Singh laid it before his master.

'I am to open it, I suppose?' said Carne, taking the key and replacing it in the lock.

'If my master pleases,' replied the other.

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Carne accordingly turned it in the lock, and, having done so, raised the lid and looked inside. His astonishment was complete. To all intents and purposes the box was empty. The comb was not to be seen, and yet the quilted sides and bottom were, to all appearances, just the same as when he had first looked inside.

'This is most wonderful,' he said. And indeed it was as clever a conjuring trick as any he had ever seen.

'Nay, it is very simple,' Wajib Baksh replied. 'The Heaven-born told me that there must be no risk of detection.'

He took the box in his own hands and running his nails down the centre of the quilting, divided the false bottom into two pieces; these he lifted out, revealing the comb lying upon the real bottom beneath.

'The sides, as my lord will see,' said Hiram Singh, taking a step forward, 'are held in their appointed places by these two springs. Thus, when the key is turned the springs relax, and the sides are driven by others into their places on the bottom, where the seams in the quilting mask the join. There is but one disadvantage. It is as follows: When the pieces which form the bottom are lifted out in order that my lord may get at whatever lies concealed beneath, the springs must of necessity stand revealed. However, to any one who knows sufficient of the working of the box to lift out the false bottom, it will be an easy matter to withdraw the springs and conceal them about his person.'

'As you say that is an easy matter,' said Carne, 'and I shall not be likely to forget. Now one other question. Presuming I am in a position to put the real box into your hands for say eight hours, do you think that in that time you can fit it up so that detection will be impossible?'

'Assuredly, my lord,' replied Hiram Singh with conviction. 'There is but the lock and the fitting of the springs to be done. Three hours at most would suffice for that.'

'I am pleased with you,' said Carne. 'As a proof of my satisfaction, when the work is finished you will each receive five hundred rupees. Now you can go.'

According to his promise, ten o'clock on the Friday following found him in his hansom driving towards Belgrave Square. He was a little anxious, though the casual observer would scarcely have been able to tell it. The magnitude of the stake for which he was playing was enough to try the nerve of even such a past master in his profession as Simon Carne.

Arriving at the house he discovered some workmen erecting an awning across the footway in preparation for the ball that was to take place at night. It was not long, however, before he found himself in the boudoir, reminding Her Grace of her promise to permit him an opportunity of making a drawing of the famous jewel case. The Duchess was naturally busy, and within a quarter of an hour he was on his way home with the box placed on the seat of the carriage beside him.

'Now,' he said, as he patted it good-humouredly, 'if only the notion worked out by Hiram Singh and Wajib Baksh holds good, the famous Wiltshire diamonds will become my property before very many hours are passed. By this time to-morrow, I suppose, London will be all agog concerning the burglary.'

On reaching his house he left his carriage, and himself carried the box into the study. Once there he rang his bell and ordered Hiram Singh and Wajib Baksh to be sent to him. When they arrived he showed them the box upon which they were to exercise their ingenuity.

'Bring the tools in here,' he said, 'and do the work under my own eyes. You have but nine hours before you, so you must make the most of them.'

The men went for their implements, and as soon as they were ready set to work. All through the day they

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were kept hard at it, with the result that by five o'clock the alterations had been effected and the case stood ready. By the time Carne returned from his afternoon drive in the Park it was quite prepared for the part it was to play in his scheme. Having praised the men, he turned them out and locked the door, then went across the room and unlocked a drawer in his writing table. From it he took a flat leather jewel case, which he opened. It contained a necklace of counterfeit diamonds, if anything a little larger than the one he intended to try to obtain. He had purchased it that morning in the Burlington Arcade for the purpose of testing the apparatus his servants had made, and this he now proceeded to do.

Laying it carefully upon the bottom he closed the lid and turned the key. When he opened it again the necklace was gone, and even though he knew the secret he could not for the life of him see where the false bottom began and ended. After that he reset the trap and tossed the necklace carelessly in. To his delight it acted as well as on the previous occasion. He could scarcely contain his satisfaction. His conscience was sufficiently elastic to give him no trouble. To him it was scarcely a robbery he was planning, but an artistic trial of skill, in which he pitted his wits and cunning against the forces of society in general.

At half-past seven he dined, and afterwards smoked a meditative cigar over the evening paper in the billiard room. The invitations to the ball were for ten o'clock, and at nine-thirty he went to his dressing-room.

'Make me tidy as quickly as you can,' he said to Belton when the latter appeared, 'and while you are doing so listen to my final instructions.

'To-night, as you know, I am endeavouring to secure the Duchess of Wiltshire's necklace. To-morrow morning all London will resound with the hubbub, and I have been

making my plans in such a way as to arrange that Klimo shall be the first person consulted. When the messenger calls, if call he does, see that the old woman next door bids him tell the Duke to come personally at twelve o'clock. Do you understand?'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'Very good. Now give me the jewel case, and let me be off. You need not sit up for me.'

Precisely as the clocks in the neighbourhood were striking ten Simon Carne reached Belgrave Square, and, as he hoped, found himself the first guest.

His hostess and her husband received him in the ante-room of the drawing-room.

'I come laden with a thousand apologies,' he said as he took Her Grace's hand, and bent over it with that ceremonious politeness which was one of the man's chief characteristics. 'I am most unconscionably early, I know, but I hastened here in order that I might personally return the jewel case you so kindly lent me. I must trust to your generosity to forgive me. The drawings took longer than I expected.'

'Please do not apologise,' answered Her Grace. 'It is very kind of you to have brought the case yourself. I hope the illustrations have proved successful. I shall look forward to seeing them as soon as they are ready. But I am keeping you holding the box. One of my servants will take it to my room.'

She called a footman to her, and bade him take the box and place it upon her dressing-table.

'Before it goes I must let you see that I have not damaged it either externally or internally,' said Carne with a laugh. 'It is such a valuable case that I should never forgive myself if it had even received a scratch during the time it has been in my possession.'

So saying he lifted the lid and allowed her to look inside.

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To all appearance it was exactly the same as when she had lent it to him earlier in the day.

'You have been most careful,' she said. And then, with an air of banter, she continued: 'If you desire it, I shall be pleased to give you a certificate to that effect.'

They jested in this fashion for a few moments after the servant's departure, during which time Carne promised to call upon her the following morning at 11 o'clock, and to bring with him the illustrations he had made and a queer little piece of china he had had the good fortune to pick up in a dealer's shop the previous afternoon. By this time fashionable London was making its way up the grand staircase, and with its appearance further conversation became impossible.

Shortly after midnight Carne bade his hostess good-night and slipped away. He was perfectly satisfied with his evening's entertainment, and if the key of the jewel case were not turned before the jewels were placed in it, he was convinced they would become his property. It speaks well for his strength of nerve when I record the fact that on going to bed his slumbers were as peaceful and untroubled as those of a little child.

Breakfast was scarcely over next morning before a hansom drew up at his front door and Lord Amberley alighted. He was ushered into Carne's presence forthwith, and on seeing that the latter was surprised at his early visit, hastened to explain.

'My dear fellow,' he said, as he took possession of the chair the other offered him, 'I have come round to see you on most important business. As I told you last night at the dance, when you so kindly asked me to come and see the steam yacht you have purchased, I had an appointment with Wiltshire at half-past nine this morning. On reaching Belgrave Square, I found the whole house in confusion. Servants were running hither and thither with scared

faces, the butler was on the borders of lunacy, the Duchess was well-nigh hysterical in her boudoir, while her husband was in his study vowing vengeance against all the world.'

'You alarm me,' said Carne, lighting a cigarette with a hand that was as steady as a rock. 'What on earth has happened?'

'I think I might safely allow you fifty guesses and then wager a hundred pounds you'd not hit the mark; and yet in a certain measure it concerns you.'

'Concerns me? Good gracious! What have I done to bring all this about?'

'Pray do not look so alarmed,' said Amberley. 'Personally you have done nothing. Indeed, on second thoughts, I don't know that I am right in saying that it concerns you at all. The fact of the matter is, Carne, a burglary took place last night at Wiltshire House, *and the famous necklace has disappeared.*'

'Good heavens! You don't say so?'

'But I *do*. The circumstances of the case are as follows: When my cousin retired to her room last night after the ball, she unclasped the necklace, and, in her husband's presence, placed it carefully in her jewel case, which she locked. That having been done, Wiltshire took the box to the room which contained the safe, and himself placed it there, locking the iron door with his own key. The room was occupied that night, according to custom, by the butler and one of the footmen, both of whom have been in the family since they were boys.

'Next morning, after breakfast, the Duke unlocked the safe and took out the box, intending to convey it to the Bank as usual. Before leaving, however, he placed it on his study-table and went upstairs to speak to his wife. He cannot remember exactly how long he was absent, but he feels convinced that he was not gone more than a quarter of an hour at the very utmost.

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'Their conversation finished, she accompanied him downstairs, where she saw him take up the case to carry it to his carriage. Before he left the house, however, she said: "I suppose you have looked to see that the necklace is all right?" "How could I do so?" was his reply. "You know you possess the only key that will fit it."

'She felt in her pockets, but to her surprise the key was not there.'

'If I were a detective I should say that that is a point to be remembered,' said Carne with a smile. 'Pray, where did she find her keys?'

'Upon her dressing-table,' said Amberley. 'Though she has not the slightest recollection of leaving them there.'

'Well, when she had procured the keys, what happened?'

'Why, they opened the box, and, to their astonishment and dismay, *found it empty. The jewels were gone!*'

'Good gracious! What a terrible loss! It seems almost impossible that it can be true. And pray, what did they do?'

'At first they stood staring into the empty box, hardly believing the evidence of their own eyes. Stare how they would, however, they could not bring them back. The jewels had, without doubt, disappeared, but when and where the robbery had taken place it was impossible to say. After that they had up all the servants and questioned them, but the result was what they might have foreseen, no one from the butler to the kitchenmaid could throw any light upon the subject. To this minute it remains as great a mystery as when they first discovered it.'

'I am more concerned than I can tell you,' said Carne. 'How thankful I ought to be that I returned the case to Her Grace last night. But in thinking of myself I am forgetting to ask what has brought you to me. If I can be of any assistance I hope you will command me.'

'Well, I'll tell you why I have come,' replied Lord Amberley. 'Naturally, they are most anxious to have the

mystery solved and the jewels recovered as soon as possible. Wiltshire wanted to send to Scotland Yard there and then, but his wife and I eventually persuaded him to consult Klimo. As you know, if the police authorities are called in first, he refuses the business altogether. Now, we thought, as you are his next door neighbour, you might possibly be able to assist us.'

'You may be very sure, my lord, I will do everything that lies in my power. Let us go in and see him at once.'

As he spoke he rose and threw what remained of his cigarette into the fireplace. His visitor having imitated his example, they procured their hats and walked round from Park Lane into Belverton Street to bring up at No. 1. After they had rung the bell the door was opened to them by the old woman who invariably received the detective's clients.

'Is Mr Klimo at home?' asked Carne. 'And if so, can we see him?'

The old lady was a 'little deaf, and the question had to be repeated before she could be made to understand what was wanted. As soon, however, as she realized their desire, she informed them that her master was absent from town, but would be back as usual at twelve o'clock to meet his clients.

'What on earth's to be done?' said the Earl, looking at his companion in dismay. 'I am afraid I can't come back again, as I have a most important appointment at that hour.'

'Do you think you could entrust the business to me?' asked Carne. 'If so, I will make a point of seeing him at twelve o'clock, and could call at Wiltshire House afterwards and tell the Duke what I have done.'

'That's very good of you,' replied Amberley. 'If you are sure it would not put you to too much trouble, that would be quite the best thing to be done.'

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'I will do it with pleasure,' Carne replied. 'I feel it my duty to help in whatever way I can.'

'You are very kind,' said the other. 'Then, as I understand it, you are to call upon Klimo at twelve o'clock, and afterwards to let my cousins know what you have succeeded in doing. I only hope he will help us to secure the thief. We are having too many of these burglaries just now. I must catch this hansom and be off. Good-bye, and many thanks.'

'Good-bye,' said Carne, and shook him by the hand.

The hansom having rolled away, Carne retraced his steps to his own abode.

'It is really very strange,' he muttered as he walked along, 'how often chance condescends to lend her assistance to my little schemes. The mere fact that His Grace left the box unwatched in his study for a quarter of an hour may serve to throw the police off on quite another scent. I am also glad that they decided to open the case in the house, for if it had gone to the bankers' and had been placed in the strong room unexamined, I should never have been able to get possession of the jewels at all.'

Three hours later he drove to Wiltshire House and saw the Duke. The Duchess was far too much upset by the catastrophe to see any one.

'This is really most kind of you, Mr Carne,' said His Grace when the other had supplied an elaborate account of his interview with Klimo. 'We are extremely indebted to you. I am sorry he cannot come before ten o'clock to-night, and that he makes this stipulation of my seeing him alone, for I must confess I should like to have had some one else present to ask any questions that might escape me. But if that's his usual hour and custom, well, we must abide by it, that's all. I hope he will do some good, for this is the greatest calamity that has ever befallen me. As I told you just now, it has made my wife quite ill. She is confined to her bedroom and quite hysterical.'

'You do not suspect any one, I suppose?' inquired Carne.

'Not a soul,' the other answered. 'The thing is such a mystery that we do not know what to think. I feel convinced, however, that my servants are as innocent as I am. Nothing will ever make me think them otherwise. I wish I could catch the fellow, that's all. I'd make him suffer for the trick he's played me.'

Carne offered an appropriate reply, and after a little further conversation upon the subject, bade the irate nobleman good-bye and left the house. From Belgrave Square he drove to one of the clubs of which he had been elected a member, in search of Lord Orpington, with whom he had promised to lunch, and afterwards took him to a ship-builder's yard near Greenwich, in order to show him the steam yacht he had lately purchased.

It was close upon dinner time before he returned to his own residence. He brought Lord Orpington with him, and they dined in state together. At nine the latter bade him good-bye, and at ten Carne retired to his dressing-room and rang for Belton.

'What have you to report,' he asked, 'with regard to what I bade you do in Belgrave Square?'

'I followed your instructions to the letter,' Belton replied. 'Yesterday morning I wrote to Messrs Horniblow and Jimson, the house agents in Piccadilly, in the name of Colonel Braithwaite, and asked for an order to view the residence to the right of Wiltshire House. I asked that the order might be sent direct to the house, where the Colonel would get it upon his arrival. This letter I posted myself in Basingstoke, as you desired me to do.'

'At nine o'clock yesterday morning I dressed myself as much like an elderly army officer as possible, and took a cab to Belgrave Square. The caretaker, an old fellow of close upon seventy years of age, admitted me immediately upon hearing my name, and proposed that he should show

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after being alone in the room with the empty jewel case and a magnifying glass for two minutes or so, he was in a position to describe the *modus operandi*, and, what is more, to put the police on the scent of the burglar.'

'And how *was* it worked?' asked Carne.

'From the empty house next door,' replied the other. 'On the morning of the burglary a man, purporting to be a retired army officer, called with an order to view, got the caretaker out of the way, clambered along to Wiltshire House by means of the parapet outside, reached the room during the time the servants were at breakfast, opened the safe, and abstracted the jewels.'

'But how did Klimo find all this out?' asked Lord Orpington.

'By his own inimitable cleverness,' replied Lord Amberley. 'At any rate it has been proved that he was correct. The man *did* make his way from next door, and the police have since discovered that an individual answering to the description given, visited a pawnbroker's shop in the city about an hour later, and stated that he had diamonds to sell.'

'If that is so it turns out to be a very simple mystery after all,' said Lord Orpington as they began their meal.

'Thanks to the ingenuity of the cleverest detective in the world,' remarked Amberley.

'In that case here's a good health to Klimo,' said the Privy Councillor, raising his glass.

'I will join you in that,' said Simon Carne. 'Here's a very good health to Klimo and his connection with the Duchess of Wiltshire's diamonds. May he always be equally successful!'

'Hear, hear to that,' replied his guests.

IV

The Affair of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Co., Limited'

Arthur Morrison

I

Cycle companies were in the market everywhere. Immense fortunes were being made in a few days and sometimes little fortunes were being lost to build them up. Mining shares were dull for a season, and any company with the word 'cycle' or 'tyre' in its title was certain to attract capital, no matter what its prospects were like in the eyes of the expert. All the old private cycle companies suddenly were offered to the public, and their proprietors, already rich men, built themselves houses on the Riviera, bought yachts, ran racehorses, and left business for ever. Sometimes the shareholders got their money's worth, sometimes more, sometimes less—sometimes they got nothing but total loss; but still the game went on. One could never open a newspaper without finding, displayed at large, the prospectus of yet another cycle company with capital expressed in six figures at least, often in seven. Solemn old dailies, into whose editorial heads no new thing ever

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me over the house. This, however, I told him was quite unnecessary, backing my speech with a present of half a crown, whereupon he returned to his breakfast perfectly satisfied, while I wandered about the house at my own leisure.

‘Reaching the same floor as that upon which is situated the room in which the Duke’s safe is kept, I discovered that your supposition was quite correct, and that it would be possible for a man, by opening the window, to make his way along the coping from one house to the other, without being seen. I made certain that there was no one in the bedroom in which the butler slept, and then arranged the long telescope walking-stick you gave me, and fixed one of my boots to it by means of the screw in the end. With this I was able to make a regular succession of footsteps in the dust along the ledge, between one window and the other.

‘That done, I went downstairs again, bade the caretaker good-morning, and got into my cab. From Belgrave Square I drove to the shop of the pawnbroker whom you told me you had discovered was out of town. His assistant inquired my business, and was anxious to do what he could for me. I told him, however, that I must see his master personally, as it was about the sale of some diamonds I had had left me. I pretended to be annoyed that he was not at home, and muttered to myself, so that the man could hear, something about its meaning a journey to Amsterdam.

‘Then I limped out of the shop, paid off my cab, and, walking down a by-street, removed my moustache, and altered my appearance by taking off my great coat and muffler. A few streets further on I purchased a bowler hat in place of the old-fashioned topper I had hitherto been wearing, and then took a cab from Piccadilly and came home.’

‘You have fulfilled my instructions admirably,’ said

Carne. 'And if the business comes off, as I expect it will, you shall receive your usual percentage. Now I must be turned into Klimo and be off to Belgrave Square to put His Grace upon the track of this burglar.'

Before he retired to rest that night Simon Carne took something, wrapped in a red silk handkerchief, from the capacious pocket of the coat Klimo had been wearing a few moments before. Having unrolled the covering, he held up to the light the magnificent necklace which for so many years had been the joy and pride of the ducal house of Wiltshire. The electric light played upon it, and touched it with a thousand different hues.

'Where so many have failed,' he said to himself, as he wrapped it in the handkerchief again and locked it in his safe, 'it is pleasant to be able to congratulate oneself on having succeeded.'

Next morning all London was astonished by the news that the famous Wiltshire diamonds had been stolen, and a few hours later Carne learnt from an evening paper that the detectives who had taken up the case, upon the supposed retirement from it of Klimo, were still completely at fault.

That evening he was to entertain several friends to dinner. They included Lord Amberley, Lord Orpington, and a prominent member of the Privy Council. Lord Amberley arrived late, but filled to overflowing with importance. His friends noticed his state, and questioned him.

'Well, gentlemen,' he answered, as he took up a commanding position upon the drawing-room hearthrug, 'I am in a position to inform you that Klimo has reported upon the case, and the upshot of it is that the Wiltshire Diamond Mystery is a mystery no longer.'

'What do you mean?' asked the others in a chorus.

'I mean that he sent in his report to Wiltshire this afternoon, as arranged. From what he said the other night,

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found its way till years after it had been forgotten elsewhere, suddenly exhibited the scandalous phenomenon of 'broken columns' in their advertising sections, and the universal prospectuses stretched outrageously across half or even all the page—a thing to cause apoplexy in the bodily system of any self-respecting manager of the old school.

In the midst of this excitement it chanced that the firm of Dorrington & Hicks were engaged upon an investigation for the famous and long-established 'Indestructible Bicycle and Tricycle Manufacturing Company', of London and Coventry. The matter was not one of sufficient intricacy or difficulty to engage Dorrington's personal attention, and it was given to an assistant. There was some doubt as to the validity of a certain patent having reference to a particular method of tightening the spokes and truing the wheels of a bicycle, and Dorrington's assistant had to make inquiries (without attracting attention to the matter) as to whether or not there existed any evidence, either documentary or in the memory of veterans, of the use of this method, or anything like it, before the year 1885. The assistant completed his inquiries and made his report to Dorrington. Now I think I have said that, from every evidence I have seen, the chief matter of Dorrington's solicitude was his own interest, and just at this time he had heard, as had others, much of the money being made in cycle companies. Also, like others, he had conceived a great desire to get the confidential advice of somebody 'in the know'—advice which might lead him into the 'good thing' desired by all the greedy who flutter about at the outside edge of the stock and share market. For this reason Dorrington determined to make this small matter of the wheel patent an affair of personal report. He was a man of infinite resource, plausibility and good-companionship, and there was money going in the cycle

trade. Why then should he lose an opportunity of making himself pleasant in the inner groves of that trade, and catch whatever might come his way—information, syndicate shares, directorships, anything? So that Dorrington made himself master of his assistant's information, and proceeded to the head office of the 'Indestructible' company on Holborn Viaduct, resolved to become the entertaining acquaintance of the managing director.

On his way his attention was attracted by a very elaborately fitted cycle shop, which his recollection told him was new. 'The Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company' was the legend gilt above the great plate-glass window, and in the window itself stood many brilliantly enamelled and plated bicycles, each labelled on the frame with the flaming red and gold transfer of the firm; and in the midst of all was another bicycle covered with dried mud, of which, however, sufficient had been carefully cleared away to expose a similar glaring transfer to those that decorated the rest—with a placard announcing that on this particular machine somebody had ridden some incredible distance on bad roads in very little more than no time at all. A crowd stood about the window and gaped respectfully at the placard, the bicycles, the transfers, and the mud, though they paid little attention to certain piles of folded white papers, endorsed in bold letters with the name of the company, with the suffix 'limited' and the word 'prospectus' in bloated black letter below. These, however, Dorrington observed at once, for he had himself that morning, in common with several thousand other people, received one by post. Also half a page of his morning paper had been filled with a copy of that same prospectus, and the afternoon had brought another copy in the evening paper. In the list of directors there was a titled name or two, together with a few unknown names—doubtless the 'practical men'. And below this list there were such positive

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promises of tremendous dividends, backed up and proved beyond dispute by such ingenious piles of business-like figures, every line of figures referring to some other line for testimonials to its perfect genuineness and accuracy that any reasonable man, it would seem, must instantly sell the hat off his head and the boots off his feet to buy one share at least, and so make his fortune for ever. True the business was but lately established, but that was just it. It had rushed ahead with such amazing rapidity (as was natural with an avalanche) that it had got altogether out of hand, and orders couldn't be executed at all; wherefore the proprietors were reluctantly compelled to let the public have some of the luck. This was Thursday. The share list was to be opened on Monday morning and closed inexorably at four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon, with a merciful extension to Wednesday morning for the candidates for wealth who were so unfortunate as to live in the country. So that it behoved everybody to waste no time lest he be numbered among the unlucky whose subscription-money should be returned in full, failing allotment. The prospectus did not absolutely say it in so many words, but no rational person could fail to feel that the directors were fervently hoping that nobody would get injured in the rush.

Dorrington passed on and reached the well-known establishment of the 'Indestructible Bicycle Company'. This was already a limited company of a private sort, and had been so for ten years or more. And before that the concern had had eight or nine years of prosperous experience. The founder of the firm, Mr Paul Mallows, was now the managing-director, and a great pillar of the cycling industry. Dorrington gave a clerk his card, and asked to see Mr Mallows.

Mr Mallows was out, it seemed, but Mr Stedman, the secretary, was in, and him Dorrington saw. Mr Stedman

was a pleasant, youngish man, who had been a famous amateur bicyclist in his time, and was still an enthusiast. In ten minutes business was settled and dismissed, and Dorrington's tact had brought the secretary into a pleasant discursive chat, with much exchange of anecdote. Dorrington expressed much interest in the subject of bicycling, and, seeing that Stedman had been a racing man, particularly as to bicycling races.

'There'll be a rare good race on Saturday, I expect,' Stedman said. 'Or rather,' he went on, 'I expect the fifty miles record will go. I fancy our man Gillett is pretty safe to win, but he'll have to move, and I quite expect to see a good set of new records on our advertisements next week. The next best man is Lant—the new fellow, you know—who rides for the "Avalanche" people.'

'Let's see, they're going to the public as a limited company, aren't they?' Dorrington asked casually.

Stedman nodded, with a little grimace.

'You don't think it's a good thing, perhaps,' Dorrington said, noticing the grimace. 'Is that so?'

'Well,' Stedman answered, 'of course I can't say. I don't know much about the firm—nobody does, as far as I can tell—but they seem to have got a business together in almost no time; that is, if the business is as genuine as it looks at first sight. But they want a rare lot of capital, and then the prospectus—well, I've seen more satisfactory ones, you know. I don't say it isn't all right, of course, but still I shan't go out of my way to recommend any friends of mine to plunge on it.'

'You won't?'

'No, I won't. Though no doubt they'll get their capital, or most of it. Almost any cycle or tyre company can get subscribed just now. And this "Avalanche" affair is both, and it is well advertised, you know. Lant has been winning on their mounts just lately, and they've been booming it

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for all they're worth. By jove, if they could only screw him up to win the fifty miles on Saturday, and beat our man Gillett, that *would* give them a push! Just at the correct moment too. Gillett's never been beaten yet at the distance, you know. But Lant can't do it—though, as I have said, he'll make some fast riding—it'll be a race, I tell you.'

'I should like to see it.'

'Why not come? See about it, will you? And perhaps you'd like to run down to the track after dinner this evening and see our man training—awfully interesting, I can tell you, with all the pacing machinery and that. Will you come?'

Dorrington expressed himself delighted, and suggested that Stedman should dine with him before going to the track. Stedman, for his part, charmed with his new acquaintance—as everybody was at a first meeting with Dorrington—assented gladly.

At that moment the door of Stedman's room was pushed open and a well-dressed, middle-aged man, with a shaven, flabby face, appeared. 'I beg pardon,' he said, 'I thought you were alone. I've just ripped my finger against the handle of my brougham door as I came in—the screw sticks out. Have you a piece of sticking plaster?' He extended a bleeding finger as he spoke. Stedman looked doubtfully at his desk.

'Here is some court plaster,' Dorrington exclaimed, producing his pocket-book. 'I always carry it—it's handier than ordinary sticking plaster. How much do you want?'

'Thanks—an inch or so.'

'This is Mr Dorrington, of Messrs Dorrington & Hicks, Mr Mallows,' Stedman said. 'Our managing director, Mr Paul Mallows, Mr Dorrington.'

Dorrington was delighted to make Mr Mallows' acquaintance, and he busied himself with a careful strapping

of the damaged finger. Mr Mallows had the large frame of a man of strong build who had had much hard bodily work, but there hung about it the heavier, softer flesh that told of a later period of ease and sloth. 'Ah, Mr Mallows,' Stedman said, 'the bicycle's the safest thing, after all! Dangerous things these broughams!'

'Ah, you younger men,' Mr Mallows replied, with a slow and rounded enunciation, 'you younger men can afford to be active. We elders——'

'Can afford a brougham,' Dorrington added, before the managing director began the next word. 'Just so—and the bicycle does it all; wonderful thing the bicycle!'

Dorrington had not misjudged his man, and the oblique reference to his wealth flattered Mr Mallows. Dorrington went once more through his report as to the spoke patent, and then Mr Mallows bade him good-bye.

'Good-day, Mr Dorrington, good-day,' he said. 'I am extremely obliged by your careful personal attention to this matter of the patent. We may leave it with Mr Stedman now, I think. Good-day. I hope soon to have the pleasure of meeting you again.' And with clumsy stateliness Mr Mallows vanished.

2

'So you don't think the "Avalanche" good business as an investment?' Dorrington said once more as he and Stedman, after an excellent dinner, were cabbing it to the track.

'No, no,' Stedman answered, 'don't touch it! There's better things than that coming along presently. Perhaps I shall be able to put you in for something, you know, a bit later; but don't be in a hurry. As to the "Avalanche", even if everything else were satisfactory, there's too much "booming" being done just now to please me. All sorts of

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rumours, you know, of their having something "up their sleeve", and so on; mysterious hints in the papers, and all that, as to something revolutionary being in hand with the "Avalanche" people. Perhaps there is. But why they don't fetch it out in view of the public subscription for shares is more than I can understand, unless they don't want too much of a rush. And as to that, well they don't look like modestly shrinking from anything of that sort up to the present.'

They were at the track soon after seven o'clock, but Gillett was not yet riding. Dorrington remarked that Gillett appeared to begin late.

'Well,' Stedman explained, 'he's one of those fellows that afternoon training doesn't seem to suit, unless it is a bit of walking exercise. He just does a few miles in the morning and a spurt or two, and then he comes on just before sunset for a fast ten or fifteen miles—that is, when he is getting fit for such a race as Saturday's. To-night will be his last spin of that length before Saturday, because to-morrow will be the day before the race. To-morrow he'll only go a spurt or two, and rest most of the day.'

They strolled about inside the track, the two highly 'banked' ends whereof seemed to a near-sighted person in the centre to be solid erect walls, along the face of which the training riders skimmed, fly-fashion. Only three or four persons beside themselves were in the enclosure when they first came, but in ten minutes' time Mr Paul Mallows came across the track.

'Why,' said Stedman to Dorrington, 'here's the Governor! It isn't often he comes down here. But I expect he's anxious to see how Gillett's going, in view of Saturday.'

'Good evening, Mr Mallows,' said Dorrington. 'I hope the finger's all right? Want any more plaster?'

'Good evening, good evening,' responded Mr Mallows heavily. 'Thank you, the finger's not troubling me a bit.'

He held it up, still decorated by the black plaster. 'Your plaster remains, you see—I was a little careful not to fray it too much in washing, that was all.' And Mr Mallows sat down on a light iron garden-chair (of which several stood here and there in the enclosure) and began to watch the riding.

The track was clear, and dusk was approaching when at last the great Gillett made his appearance on the track. He answered a friendly question or two put to him by Mallows and Stedman, and then, giving his coat to his trainer, swung off along the track on his bicycle, led in front by a tandem and closely attended by a triplet. In fifty yards his pace quickened, and he settled down into a swift even pace, regular as clockwork. Sometimes the tandem and sometimes the triplet went to the front, but Gillett neither checked nor heeded as, nursed by his pacers, who were directed by the trainer from the centre, he swept along mile after mile, each mile in but a few seconds over the two minutes.

'Look at the action!' exclaimed Stedman with enthusiasm. 'Just watch him. Not an ounce of power wasted there! Did you ever see more regular ankle work? And did anybody ever sit a machine quite so well as that? Show me a movement anywhere above the hips!'

'Ah,' said Mr Mallows, 'Gillett has a wonderful style—a wonderful style, really!'

The men in the enclosure wandered about here and there on the grass, watching Gillett's riding as one watches the performance of a great piece of art—which, indeed, was what Gillett's riding was. There were, besides Mallows, Stedman, Dorrington and the trainer, two officials of the Cyclists' Union, an amateur racing man named Sparks, the track superintendent and another man. The sky grew darker, and gloom fell about the track. The machines became invisible, and little could be seen of the riders across

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the ground but the row of rhythmically working legs and the white cap that Gillett wore. The trainer had just told Stedman that there would be three fast laps and then his man would come off the track.

'Well, Mr Stedman,' said Mr Mallows, 'I think we shall be all right for Saturday.'

'Rather!' answered Stedman confidently. 'Gillett's going great guns, and steady as a watch!'

The pace now suddenly increased. The tandem shot once more to the front, the triplet hung on the rider's flank, and the group of swishing wheels flew round the track at a 'one-fifty' gait. The spectators turned about, following the riders round the track with their eyes. And then, swinging into the straight from the top bend, the tandem checked suddenly and gave a little jump. Gillett crashed into it from behind, and the triplet, failing to clear, wavered and swung, and crashed over and along the track too. All three machines and six men were involved in one complicated smash.

Everybody rushed across the grass, the trainer first. Then the cause of the disaster was seen. Lying on its side on the track, with men and bicycles piled over and against it, was one of the green painted light iron garden-chairs that had been standing in the enclosure. The triplet men were struggling to their feet, and though much cut and shaken, seemed the least hurt of the lot. One of the men of the tandem was insensible, and Gillett, who from his position had got all the worst of it, lay senseless too, badly cut and bruised, and his left arm was broken.

The trainer was cursing and tearing his hair. 'If I knew who'd done this,' Stedman cried, 'I'd *pulp* him with that chair!'

'Oh, that betting, that betting!' wailed Mr Mallows, hopping about distractedly; 'see what it leads people into doing! It can't have been an accident, can it?'

'Accident? Skittles! A man doesn't put a chair on a track in the dark and leave it there by accident. Is anybody getting away there from the outside of the track?'

'No, there's nobody. He wouldn't wait till this; he's clear off a minute ago and more. Here, Fielders! Shut the outer gate, and we'll see who's about.'

But there seemed to be no suspicious character. Indeed, except for the ground-man, his boy, Gillett's trainer, and a racing man, who had just finished dressing in the pavilion, there seemed to be nobody about beyond those whom everybody had seen standing in the enclosure. But there had been ample time for anybody, standing unnoticed at the outer rails, to get across the track in the dark, just after the riders had passed, place the obstruction, and escape before the completion of the lap.

The damaged men were helped or carried into the pavilion, and the damaged machines were dragged after them. 'I will give fifty pounds gladly—more, a hundred,' said Mr Mallows, excitedly, 'to anybody who will find out who put the chair on the track. It might have ended in murder. Some wretched bookmaker, I suppose, who has taken too many bets on Gillett. As I've said a thousand times, betting is the curse of all sport nowadays.'

'The governor excites himself a great deal about betting and bookmakers,' Stedman said to Dorrington, as they walked toward the pavilion, 'but, between you and me, I believe some of the "Avalanche" people are in this. The betting bee is always in Mallows' bonnet, but as a matter of fact there's very little betting at all on cycle races, and what there is is little more than a matter of half-crowns or at most half-sovereigns on the day of the race. No bookmaker ever makes a heavy book first. Still there *may* be something in it this time, of course. But look at the "Avalanche" people. With Gillett away their man can certainly win on Saturday, and if only the weather keeps

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fair he can almost as certainly beat the record; just at present the fifty miles is fairly easy, and it's bound to go soon. Indeed, our intention was that Gillett should pull it down on Saturday. He was a safe winner, bar accidents, and it was good odds on his altering the record, if the weather were any good at all. With Gillett out of it Lant is just about as certain a winner as our man would be if all were well. And there would be a boom for the "Avalanche" company, on the very eve of the share subscription! Lant, you must know, was very second-rate till this season, but he has improved wonderfully in the last month or two, since he has been with the "Avalanche" people. Let him win, and they can point to the machine as responsible for it all. "Here", they will say in effect, "is a man who could rarely get in front, even in second-class company, till he rode an "Avalanche". Now he beats the world's record for fifty miles on it, and makes rings round the topmost professionals!" Why, it will be worth thousands of capital to them. Of course the subscription of capital won't hurt us, but the loss of the record may, and to have Gillett knocked out like this in the middle of the season is serious.'

'Yes, I suppose with you it is more than a matter of this one race.'

'Of course. And so it will be with the "Avalanche" company. Don't you see, with Gillett probably useless for the rest of the season, Lant will have it all his own way at anything over ten miles. That'll help to boom up the shares and there'll be big profit made on trading in them. Oh, I tell you this thing seems pretty suspicious to me.'

'Look here,' said Dorrington, 'can you borrow a light for me, and let me run over with it to the spot where the smash took place? The people have cleared into the pavilion and I could go alone.'

'Certainly. Will you have a try for the governor's hundred?'

'Well, perhaps. But anyway there's no harm in doing you a good turn if I can, while I'm here. Some day perhaps you'll do me one.'

'Right you are—I'll ask Fielders, the ground-man.'

A lantern was brought, and Dorrington betook himself to the spot where the iron chair still lay, while Stedman joined the rest of the crowd in the pavilion.

Dorrington minutely examined the grass within two yards of the place where the chair lay, and then, crossing the track and getting over the rails, did the same with the damp gravel that paved the outer ring. The track itself was of cement, and unimpressible by footmarks, but nevertheless he scrutinized that with equal care, as well as the rails. Then he turned his attention to the chair. It was, as I have said, a light chair made of flat iron strip, bent to shape and riveted. It had seen good service, and its present coat of green paint was evidently far from being its original one. Also it was rusty in places, and parts had been repaired and strengthened with cross-pieces secured by bolts and square nuts, some rusty and loose. It was from one of these square nuts, holding a cross-piece that stayed the back at the top, that Dorrington secured some object—it might have been a hair—which he carefully transferred to his pocket-book. This done, with one more glance round, he betook himself to the pavilion.

A surgeon had arrived, and he reported well of the chief patient. It was a simple fracture, and a healthy subject. When Dorrington entered, preparations were beginning for setting the limb. There was a sofa in the pavilion, and the surgeon saw no reason for removing the patient till all was made secure.

'Found anything?' asked Stedman in a low tone of Dorrington.

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Dorrington shook his head. 'Not much,' he answered at a whisper. 'I'll think over it later.'

Dorrington asked one of the Cyclists' Union officials for the loan of a pencil, and, having made a note with it, immediately, in another part of the room, asked Sparks, the amateur, to lend him another.

Stedman had told Mr Mallows of Dorrington's late employment with the lantern, and the managing director now said quietly, 'You remember what I said about rewarding anybody who discovered the perpetrator of this outrage, Mr Dorrington? Well, I was excited at the time, but I quite hold to it. It is a shameful thing. You have been looking about the grounds, I hear. I hope you have come across something that will enable you to find something out. Nothing will please me more than to have to pay you, I'm sure.'

'Well,' Dorrington confessed, 'I'm afraid I haven't seen anything very big in the way of a clue, Mr Mallows; but I'll think a bit. The worst of it is, you never know who these betting men are, do you, once they get away? There are so many, and it may be anybody. Not only that, but they may bribe anybody.'

'Yes, of course—there's no end to their wickedness, I'm afraid. Stedman suggests that trade rivalry may have had something to do with it. But that seems an uncharitable view, don't you think? Of course we stand very high, and there are jealousies and all that, but this is a thing I'm sure no firm would think of stooping to, for a moment. No, it's betting that is at the bottom of this, I fear. And I hope, Mr Dorrington, that you will make some attempt to find the guilty parties.'

Presently Stedman spoke to Dorrington again. 'Here's something that may help you,' he said. 'To begin with, it must have been done by some one from the outside of the track.'

‘Why?’

‘Well, at least every probability’s that way. Everybody inside was directly interested in Gillett’s success, excepting the Union officials and Sparks, who’s a gentleman and quite above suspicion, as much so, indeed, as the Union officials. Of course there was the ground-man, but he’s all right, I’m sure.’

‘And the trainer?’

‘Oh, that’s altogether improbable—altogether. I was going to say——’

‘And there’s that other man who was standing about; I haven’t heard who he was.’

‘Right you are. I don’t know him either. Where is he now?’

But the man had gone.

‘Look here, I’ll make some quiet inquiries about that man,’ Stedman pursued. ‘I forgot all about him in the excitement of the moment. I was going to say that although whoever did it could easily have got away by the gate before the smash came, he might not have liked to go that way in case of observation in passing the pavilion. In that case he could have got away (and indeed he could have got into the grounds to begin with) by way of one of those garden walls that bound the ground just by where the smash occurred. If that were so he must either live in one of the houses, or he must know somebody that does. Perhaps you might put a man to smell about along the road—it’s only a short one; Chisnall Road’s the name.’

‘Yes, yes,’ Dorrington responded patiently. ‘There might be something in that.’

By this time Gillett’s arm was in a starched bandage and secured by splints, and a cab was ready to take him home. Mr Mallows took Stedman away with him, expressing a desire to talk business, and Dorrington went home by himself. He did not turn down Chisnall Road. But he

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walked jauntily along toward the nearest cab-stand, and once or twice he chuckled, for he saw his way to a delightfully lucrative financial operation in cycle companies, without risk of capital.

The cab gained, he called at the lodgings of two of his men assistants and gave them instant instructions. Then he packed a small bag at his rooms in Conduit Street, and at midnight was in the late fast train for Birmingham.

8

The prospectus of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company' stated that the works were at Exeter and Birmingham. Exeter is a delightful old town, but it can scarcely be regarded as the centre of the cycle trade; neither is it in especially easy and short communication with Birmingham. It was the sort of thing that any critic anxious to pick holes in the prospectus might wonder at, and so one of Dorrington's assistants had gone by the night mail to inspect the works. It was from this man that Dorrington, in Birmingham, about noon on the day after Gillett's disaster, received this telegram—

Works here old disused cloth-mills just out of town. Closed and empty but with big new signboard and notice that works now running are at Birmingham. Agent says only deposit paid—tenancy agreement not signed.—Farrish.

The telegram increased Dorrington's satisfaction, for he had just taken a look at the Birmingham works. They were not empty, though nearly so, nor were they large; and a man there had told him that the chief premises, where most of the work was done, were at Exeter. And the hollower the business the better prize he saw in store for himself. He had already, early in the morning, indulged

Arthur Morrison

in a telegram on his own account, though he had not signed it. This was how it ran—

*Mallows, 58, Upper Sandown Place,
London, W.*

Fear all not safe here. Run down by 10.10 train without fail.

Thus it happened that at a little later than half-past eight Dorrington's other assistant, watching the door of No. 58, Upper Sandown Place, saw a telegram delivered, and immediately afterwards Mr Paul Mallows in much haste dashed away in a cab which was called from the end of the street. The assistant followed in another. Mr Mallows dismissed his cab at a theatrical wig-maker's in Bow Street and entered. When he emerged in little more than forty minutes' time, none but a practised watcher, who had guessed the reason for the visit, would have recognized him. He had not assumed the clumsy disguise of a false beard. He was 'made up' deftly. His colour was heightened, and his face seemed thinner. There was no heavy accession of false hair, but a slight crepe-hair whisker at each side made a better and less pronounced disguise. He seemed a younger, healthier man. The watcher saw him safely off to Birmingham by the ten minutes past ten train, and then gave Dorrington note by telegraph of the guise in which Mr Mallows was travelling.

Now this train was timed to arrive at Birmingham at one, which was the reason that Dorrington had named it in the anonymous telegram. The entrance to the 'Avalanche' works was by a large gate, which was closed, but which was provided with a small door to pass a man. Within was a yard, and at a little before one o'clock Dorrington pushed open the small door, peeped, and entered. Nobody was about in the yard, but what little noise could be heard came from a particular part of the building on the right.

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A pile of solid 'export' crates stood to the left, and these Dorrington had noted at his previous call that morning as making a suitable hiding-place for temporary use. Now he slipped behind them and awaited the stroke of one. Prompt at the hour a door on the opposite side of the yard swung open, and two men and a boy emerged and climbed one after another through the little door in the big gate. Then presently another man, not a workman, but apparently a sort of overseer, came from the opposite door, which he carelessly let fall to behind him, and he also disappeared through the little door, which he then locked. Dorrington was now alone in the sole active works of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company, Limited'.

He tried the door opposite and found it was free to open. Within he saw in a dark corner a candle which had been left burning, and opposite him a large iron enamelling oven, like an immense safe, and round about, on benches, were strewn heaps of the glaring red and gold transfer which Dorrington had observed the day before on the machines exhibited in the Holborn Viaduct window. Some of the frames had the label newly applied, and others were still plain. It would seem that the chief business of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company, Limited', was the attaching of labels to previously nondescript machines. But there was little time to examine further, and indeed Dorrington presently heard the noise of a key in the outer gate. So he stood and waited by the enamelling oven to welcome Mr Mallows.

As the door was pushed open Dorrington advanced and bowed politely. Mallows started guiltily, but, remembering his disguise, steadied himself, and asked gruffly, 'Well, sir, and who are you?'

'I,' answered Dorrington with perfect composure, 'I am Mr Paul Mallows—you may have heard of me in connection with the "Indestructible Bicycle Company".'

Mallows was altogether taken aback. But then it struck him that perhaps the detective, anxious to win the reward he had offered in the matter of the Gillett outrage, was here making inquiries in the assumed character of the man who stood, impenetrably disguised, before him. So after a pause he asked again, a little less gruffly, 'And what may be your business?'

'Well,' said Dorrington, 'I did think of taking shares in this company. I suppose there would be no objection to the managing director of another company taking shares in this?'

'No,' answered Mallows, wondering what all this was to lead to.

'Of course not; I'm sure *you* don't think so, eh?' Dorrington, as he spoke, looked in the other's face with a sly leer, and Mallows began to feel altogether uncomfortable. 'But there's one other thing,' Dorrington pursued, taking out his pocket-book, though still maintaining his leer in Mallows's face—'one other thing. And by the way, *will* you have another piece of court plaster now I've got it out? Don't say no. It's a pleasure to oblige you, really.' And Dorrington, his leer growing positively fiendish, tapped the side of his nose with the case of court plaster.

Mallows paled under the paint, gasped, and felt for support. Dorrington laughed pleasantly. 'Come, come,' he said, 'don't be frightened. I admire your cleverness, Mr Mallows, and I shall arrange everything pleasantly, as you will see. And as to the court plaster, if you'd rather not have it you needn't. You have another piece on now, I see. Why didn't you get them to paint it over at Clarkson's? They really did the face very well, though! And there again you were quite right. Such a man as yourself was likely to be recognized in such a place as Birmingham, and that would have been unfortunate for both of us—'

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both of us, I assure you. . . . Man alive, don't look as though I was going to cut your throat! I'm not, I assure you. You're a smart man of business, and I happen to have spotted a little operation of yours, that's all. I shall arrange easy terms for you. . . . Pull yourself together and talk business before the men come back. Here, sit on this bench.'

Mallows, staring amazedly in Dorrington's face, suffered himself to be led to a bench, and sat on it.

'Now,' said Dorrington, 'the first thing is a little matter of a hundred pounds. That was the reward you promised if I should discover who broke Gillett's arm last night. Well, I *have*. Do you happen to have any notes with you? If not, make it a cheque.'

'But—but—how—I mean who—who——'

'Tut, tut! Don't waste time, Mr Mallows. *Who?* Why, yourself, of course. I knew all about it before I left you last night, though it wasn't quite convenient to claim the reward then, for reasons you'll understand presently. Come, that little hundred.'

'But what—what proof have you? I'm not to be bounced like this, you know.' Mr Mallows was gathering his faculties again.

'Proof? Why, man alive, be reasonable! Suppose I have none—none at all? What difference does that make? Am I to walk out and tell your fellow directors where I have met you—here—or am I to have that hundred? More, am I to publish abroad that Mr Paul Mallows is the moving spirit in the rotten "Avalanche Bicycle Company"?''

'Well,' Mallows answered reluctantly, 'if you put it like that——'

'But I only put it like that to make you see things reasonably. As a matter of fact your connection with this new company is enough to bring your little performance with the iron chair near proof. But I got at it from the other side. See here—you're much too clumsy with your

fingers, Mr Mallows. First you go and tear the tip of your middle finger opening your brougham door, and have to get court plaster from me. Then you let that court plaster get frayed at the edge, and you still keep it on. After that you execute your very successful chair operation. When the eyes of the others are following the bicycles you take the chair in the hand with the plaster on it, catching hold of it at the place where a rough, loose, square nut protrudes, and you pitch it on to the track so clumsily and nervously that the nut carries away the frayed thread of the court plaster with it. Here it is, you see, still in my pocket-book, where I put it last night by the light of the lantern; just a sticky black silk thread, that's all. I've only brought it to show you I'm playing a fair game with you. Of course I might easily have got a witness before I took the thread off the nut, if I had thought you were likely to fight the matter. But I knew you were not. You can't fight, you know, with this bogus company business known to me. So that I am only showing you this thread as an act of grace, to prove that I have stumped you with perfect fairness. And now the hundred. Here's a fountain pen, if you want one.'

'Well,' said Mallows glumly, 'I suppose I must, then.' He took the pen and wrote the cheque. Dorrington blotted it on the pad of his pocket-book and folded it away.

'So much for that!' he said. 'That's just a little preliminary, you understand. We've done these little things just as a guarantee of good faith—not necessarily for publication, though you must remember that as yet there's nothing to prevent it. I've done you a turn by finding out who upset those bicycles, as you so ardently wished me to do last night, and you've loyally fulfilled your part of the contract by paying the promised reward—though I must say that you haven't paid with all the delight and pleasure you spoke of at the time. But I'll forgive you that,

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and now that the little hors d'œuvre is disposed of, we'll proceed to serious business.'

Mallows looked uncomfortably glum.

'But you mustn't look so ashamed of yourself, you know,' Dorrington said, purposely misinterpreting his glumness. 'It's all business. You were disposed for a little side flutter, so to speak—a little speculation outside your regular business. Well, you mustn't be ashamed of that.'

'No,' Mallows observed, assuming something of his ordinarily ponderous manner; 'no, of course not. It's a little speculative deal. Everybody does it, and there's a deal of money going.'

'Precisely. And since everybody does it, and there is so much money going, you are only making your share.'

'Of course.' Mr Mallows was almost pompous by now.

'Of course.' Dorrington coughed slightly. 'Well now, do you know, I am exactly the same sort of man as yourself—if you don't mind the comparison. *I* am disposed for a little side flutter, so to speak—a little speculation outside my regular business. I also am not ashamed of it. And since everybody does it, and there is so much money going—why, *I* am thinking of making *my* share. So we are evidently a pair, and naturally intended for each other!'

Mr Paul Mallows here looked a little doubtful.

'See here, now,' Dorrington proceeded. 'I have lately taken it into my head to operate a little on the cycle share market. That was why I came round myself about that little spoke affair, instead of sending an assistant. I wanted to know somebody who understood the cycle trade, from whom I might get tips. You see I'm perfectly frank with you. Well, I have succeeded uncommonly well. And I want you to understand that I have gone every step of the way by fair work. I took nothing for granted, and I played the game fairly. When you asked me (as you had anxious reason to ask) if I had found anything, I told you there

was nothing very big—and see what a little thing the thread was! Before I came away from the pavilion I made sure that you were really the only man there with black court plaster on his fingers. I had noticed the hands of every man but two, and I made an excuse of borrowing something to see those. I saw your thin pretence of suspecting the betting men, and I played up to it. I have had a telegraphic report on your Exeter works this morning—a deserted cloth mills with nothing on it of yours but a sign-board, and only a deposit of rent paid. *There* they referred to the works here. *Here* they referred to the works there. It was very clever, really! Also I have had a telegraphic report of your make-up adventure this morning. Clarkson does it marvellously, doesn't he? And, by the way, that telegram bringing you down to Birmingham was not from your confederate here, as perhaps you fancied. It was from me. Thanks for coming so promptly. I managed to get a quiet look round here just before you arrived, and on the whole the conclusion I come to as to the "Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company, Limited", is this: A clever man, whom it gives me great pleasure to know, with a bow to Mallows, 'conceives the notion of offering the public the very rottenest cycle company ever planned, and all without appearing in it himself. He finds what little capital is required; his two or three confederates help to make up a board of directors, with one or two titled guinea-pigs, who know nothing of the company and care nothing, and the rest's easy. A professional racing man is employed to win races and make records, on machines which have been specially made by another firm (perhaps it was the "Indestructible", who knows?) to a private order, and afterwards decorated with the name and style of the bogus company on a transfer. For ordinary sale, bicycles of the "trade" description are bought—so much a hundred from the factors, and put your own name

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on 'em. They come cheap, and they sell at a good price—the profit pays all expenses and perhaps a bit over; and by the time they all break down the company will be successfully floated, the money—the capital—will be divided, the moving spirit and his confederates will have disappeared, and the guinea-pigs will be left to stand the racket—if there is a racket. And the moving spirit will remain unsuspected, a man of account in the trade all the time! Admirable! All the work to be done at the “works” is the sticking on of labels and a bit of enamelling. Excellent, all round! Isn't that about the size of your operations?’

‘Well, yes,’ Mallows answered, a little reluctantly, but with something of modest pride in his manner, ‘that was the notion, since you speak so plainly.’

‘And it shall be the notion. All—everything—shall be as you have planned it, with one exception, which is this. The moving spirit shall divide his plunder with me.’

‘You? But—but—why, I gave you a hundred just now!’

‘Dear, dear! Why will you harp so much on that vulgar little hundred? That's settled and done with. That's our little personal bargain in the matter of the lamentable accident with the chair. We are now talking of bigger business—not hundreds, but thousands, and not one of them, but a lot. Come now, a mind like yours should be wide enough to admit of a broad and large view of things. If I refrain from exposing this charming scheme of yours I shall be promoting a piece of scandalous robbery. Very well then, I want my promotion money, in the regular way. Can I shut my eyes and allow a piece of iniquity like this to go on unchecked, without getting anything by way of damages for myself? Perish the thought! When all expenses are paid, and the confederates are sent off with as little as they will take, you and I will divide fairly, Mr Mallows, respectable brothers in rascality. Mind, I might say we'd divide to begin with, and leave you to pay

expenses, but I am always fair to a partner in anything of this sort. I shall just want a little guarantee, you know—it's safest in such matters as these; say a bill at six months for ten thousand pounds—which is very low. When a satisfactory division is made you shall have the bill back. Come—I have a bill-stamp ready, being so much convinced of your reasonableness as to buy it this morning, though it cost five pounds.'

'But that's nonsense—you're trying to impose. I'll give you anything reasonable—half is out of the question. What, after all the trouble and worry and risk that I've had?'

'Which would suffice for no more than to put you in gaol if I held up my finger!'

'But hang it, be reasonable! You're a mighty clever man, and you've got me on the hip, as I admit. Say ten per cent.'

'You're wasting time, and presently the men will be back. Your choice is between making half, or making none, and going to gaol into the bargain. Choose!'

'But just consider——'

'Choose!'

Mallows looked despairingly about him. 'But really,' he said, 'I want the money more than you think. I——'

'For the last time—choose!'

Mallow's despairing gaze stopped at the enamelling oven. 'Well, well,' he said, 'if I must, I must, I suppose. But I warn you, you may regret it.'

'Oh dear no, I'm not so pessimistic. Come, you wrote a cheque—now I'll write the bill. "Six months after date, pay to me or my order the sum of ten thousand pounds for value received"—excellent value too, *I* think. There you are!'

When the bill was written and signed, Mallows scribbled his acceptance with more readiness than might have been

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expected. Then he rose, and said with something of brisk cheerfulness in his tone, 'Well, that's done, and the least said the soonest mended. You've won it, and I won't grumble any more. I think I've done this thing pretty neatly, eh? Come and see the "works".'

Every other part of the place was empty of machinery. There were a good many finished frames and wheels, bought separately, and now in course of being fitted together for sale; and there were many more complete bicycles of cheap but showy make to which nothing needed to be done but to fix the red and gold 'transfer' of the 'Avalanche' company. Then Mallows opened the tall iron door of the enamelling oven.

'See this,' he said; 'this is the enamelling oven. Get in and look round. The frames and other different parts hang on the racks after the enamel is laid on, and all those gas jets are lighted to harden it by heat. Do you see that deeper part there by the back?—go closer.'

Dorrington felt a push at his back and the door was swung to with a bang, and the latch dropped. He was in the dark, trapped in a great iron chamber. 'I warned you,' shouted Mallows from without; 'I warned you you might regret it!' And instantly Dorrington's nostrils were filled with the smell of escaping gas. He realized his peril on the instant. Mallows had given him the bill with the idea of silencing him by murder and recovering it. He had pushed him into the oven and had turned on the gas. It was dark, but to light a match would mean death instantly, and without the match it must be death by suffocation and poison of gas in a very few minutes. To appeal to Mallows was useless—Dorrington knew too much. It would seem that at last a horribly-fitting retribution had overtaken Dorrington in death by a mode parallel to that which he and his creatures had prepared for others. Dorrington's victims had drowned in water—and now Dorrington

himself was to drown in gas. The oven was of sheet iron, fastened by a latch in the centre. Dorrington flung himself desperately against the door, and it gave outwardly at the extreme bottom. He snatched a loose angle-iron with which his hand came in contact, dashed against the door once more, and thrust the iron through where it strained open. Then, with another tremendous plunge, he drove the door a little more outward and raised the angle-iron in the crack; then once more, and raised it again. He was near to losing his senses, when, with one more plunge, the catch of the latch, not designed for such treatment, suddenly gave way, the door flew open, and Dorrington, blue in the face, staring, stumbling and gasping, came staggering out into the fresher air, followed by a gush of gas.

Mallows had retreated to the rooms behind, and thither Dorrington followed him, gaining vigour and fury at every step. At sight of him the wretched Mallows sank in a corner, sighing and shivering with terror. Dorrington reached him and clutched him by the collar. There should be no more honour between these two thieves now. He would drag Mallows forth and proclaim him aloud; and he would keep that £10,000 bill. He hauled the struggling wretch across the room, tearing off the crêpe whiskers as he came, while Mallows supplicated and whined, fearing that it might be the other's design to imprison *him* in the enamelling oven. But at the door of the room against that containing the oven their progress came to an end, for the escaped gas had reached the lighted candle, and with one loud report the partition wall fell in, half burying Mallows where he lay, and knocking Dorrington over.

Windows fell out of the building, and men broke through the front gate, climbed into the ruined rooms and stopped the still escaping gas. When the two men and the boy returned, with the conspirator who had been in charge of the works, they found a crowd from the hardware and cycle

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factories thereabout, surveying with great interest the spectacle of the extrication of Mr Paul Mallows, managing director of the 'Indestructible Bicycle Company', from the broken bricks, mortar, bicycles and transfers of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company, Limited', and the preparations for carrying him to a surgeon's where his broken leg might be set. As for Dorrington, a crushed hat and a torn coat were all his hurts, beyond a few scratches. And in a couple of hours it was all over Birmingham, and spreading to other places, that the business of the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company' consisted of sticking brilliant labels on factors' bicycles, bought in batches; for the whole thing was thrown open to the general gaze by the explosion. So that when, next day, Lant won the fifty miles race in London, he was greeted with ironical shouts of 'Gum on yer transfer!' 'Hi! mind your label!' 'Where did you steal that bicycle?' 'Sold yer shares?' and so forth.

Somehow the 'Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Company, Limited', never went to allotment. It was said that a few people in remote and benighted spots, where news never came till it was in the history books, had applied for shares, but the bankers returned their money, doubtless to their extreme disappointment. It was found politic, also, that Mr Paul Mallows should retire from the directorate of the 'Indestructible Bicycle Company'—a concern which is still, I believe, flourishing exceedingly.

As for Dorrington, he had his hundred pounds reward. But the bill for £10,000 he never presented. Why, I do not altogether know, unless he found that Mr Mallow's financial position, as he had hinted, was not altogether so good as was supposed. At any rate, it was found among the notes and telegrams in this case in the Dorrington deed-box.

V

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Clifford Ashdown

As six o'clock struck the procession of the un-dined began to stream beneath the electric arcade which graces the entrance to Cristiani's. The doors swung unceasingly; the mirrors no longer reflected a mere squadron of tables and erect serviettes; a hum of conversation now mingled with the clatter of knives and the popping of corks; and the brisk scurry of waiters' slippers replaced the stillness of the afternoon.

Although the restaurant had been crowded some time before he arrived, Mr Romney Pringle had secured his favourite seat opposite the feminine print after Gainsborough, and in the intervals of feeding listened to a selection from Mascagni through a convenient electrophone, price sixpence in the slot. It was a warm night for the time of year, a muggy spell having succeeded a week of biting north-east wind, and as the evening wore on the atmosphere grew somewhat oppressive, more particularly to those who had dined well. Its effects were not very visible on Pringle, whose complexion (a small port-wine mark on his right cheek its only blemish) was of that fairness which imparts to its fortunate possessor the air of

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youth until long past forty; especially in a man who shaves clean, and habitually goes to bed before two in the morning.

As the smoke from Pringle's havana wreathed upwards to an extractor, his eye fell, not for the first time, upon a diner at the next table. He was elderly, probably on the wrong side of sixty, but with his erect figure might easily have claimed a few years' grace, while the retired soldier spoke in his scrupulous neatness, and in the trim of a carefully tended moustache. He had finished his dinner some little time, but remained seated, studying a letter with an intentness more due to its subject than to its length, which Pringle could see was by no means excessive. At last, with a gesture almost equally compounded of weariness and disgust, he rose and was helped into his overcoat by a waiter, who held the door for him in the obsequious manner of his kind.

The languid attention which Pringle at first bestowed on his neighbour had by this time given place to a deeper interest, and as the swing-doors closed behind the old gentleman, he scarcely repressed a start, when he saw lying beneath the vacant table the identical letter which had received such careful study. His first impulse was to run after the old gentleman and restore the paper, but by this time he had disappeared, and the waiter being also invisible, Pringle sat down and read:

'The Assyrian Rejuvenator Co.,
82, Barbican, E.C. April 5th

'Dear Sir—We regret to hear of the failure of the "Rejuvenator" in your hands. This is possibly due to your not having followed the directions for its use sufficiently closely, but I must point out that we do not guarantee its infallible success. As it is an expensive preparation, we do not admit the justice of your contention that our charges are exorbitant. In

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any case we cannot entertain your request to return the whole or any part of the fees. Should you act upon your threat to take proceedings for the recovery of the same, we must hold your good self responsible for any publicity which may follow your trial of the preparation.

Yours faithfully,
Henry Jacobs,
Secretary.

Lieut.-Col. Sandstream,
272, Piccadilly, W.'

To Pringle this businesslike communication hardly seemed to deserve so much consideration as Colonel Sandstream had given it, but having read and pondered it over afresh, he walked back to his chambers in Furnival's Inn.

He lived at No. 33, on the left as you enter from Holborn, and anyone who, scaling the stone stairs, reached the second floor, might observe on the entrance to the front set of chambers the legend, 'Mr Romney Pringle, Literary Agent'. According to high authority, the reason of being of the literary agent is to act as a buffer between the ravaging publisher and his prey. But although a very fine oak bureau with capacious pigeon-holes stood conspicuously in Pringle's sitting-room, it was tenanted by no rolls of MS, or type-written sheets. Indeed, little or no business appeared to be transacted in the chambers. The buffer was at present idle, if it could be said to have ever worked! It was 'resting' to use the theatrical expression.

Mr Pringle was an early riser, and as nine o'clock chimed the next morning from the brass lantern-clock which ticked sedately on a mantel unencumbered by the usual litter of a bachelor's quarters, he had already spent some time in consideration of last night's incident, and a further study of the letter had only served thoroughly to arouse his curiosity, and decided him to investigate the affair of the

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mysterious 'Rejuvenator'. Unlocking a cupboard in the bottom of the bureau, he disclosed a regiment of bottles and jars. Sprinkling a few drops from one on to a hare's-foot, he succeeded, with a little friction, in entirely removing the port-wine mark from his cheek. Then from another phial he saturated a sponge and rubbed it into his eyebrows, which turned in the process from their original yellow to a jetty black. From a box of several, he selected a waxed moustache (that most facile article of disguise), and having attached it with a few drops of spirit-gum, covered his scalp with a black wig, which, as is commonly the case, remained an aggressive fraud in spite of the most assiduous adjustment. Satisfied with the completeness of his disguise, he sallied out in search of the offices of the 'Assyrian Rejuvenator', affecting a military bearing which his slim but tall and straight-backed figure readily enabled him to assume.

'My name is Parkins—Major Parkins,' said Pringle, as he opened the door of a mean-looking room on the second floor of No. 82, Barbican. He addressed an oleaginous-looking gentleman, whose curly locks and beard suggested the winged bulls of Nineveh, and who appeared to be the sole representative of the concern. The latter bowed politely, and handed him a chair.

'I have been asked,' Pringle continued, 'by a friend who saw your advertisement to call upon you for some further information.'

Now the subject of rejuvenation being a delicate one, especially where ladies are concerned, the business of the company was mainly transacted through the post. So seldom, indeed, did a client desire a personal interview, that the Assyrian-looking gentleman jumped to the conclusion that his visitor was interested in quite another matter.

'Ah yes! You refer to "Pelosia",' he said briskly. 'Allow me to read you an extract from the prospectus.'

And before Pringle could reply he proceeded to read from a small leaflet with unctuous elocution:

'Pelosia. The sovereign remedy of Mud has long been used with the greatest success in the celebrated baths of Schwalbach and Franzensbad. The proprietors of Pelosia having noted the beneficial effect which many of the lower animals derive from the consumption of earth with their food, have been led to investigate the internal uses of mud. The success which has crowned the treatment of some of the longest-standing cases of dyspepsia (the disease so characteristic of this neurotic age), has induced them to admit the world at large to its benefits. To thoroughly safeguard the public, the proprietors have secured the sole right to the alluvial deposits of a stream remote from human habitation, and consequently above any suspicion of contamination. Careful analysis has shown that the deposit in this particular locality, consisting of finely divided mineral particles, practically free from organic admixture, is calculated to give the most gratifying results. The proprietors are prepared to quote special terms for public institutions.'

'Many thanks,' said Pringle, as the other momentarily paused for breath; 'but I think you are under a slight misapprehension. I called on you with reference to the "Assyrian Rejuvenator". Have I mistaken the offices?'

'Pray excuse my absurd mistake! I am secretary of the "Assyrian Rejuvenator Company", who are also the proprietors of "Pelosia".' And in evident concern he regarded Pringle fixedly.

It was not the first time he had known a diffident person to assume an interest in the senility of an absent friend, and he mentally decided that Pringle's waxed moustache, its blue-blackness speaking loudly of hair-dye, together with the unmistakable wig, were evidence of the decrepitude

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for which his new customer presumably sought the Company's assistance.

'Ours, my dear sir,' he resumed, leaning back in his chair, and placing the tips of his fingers in apposition—'Ours is a world-renowned specific for removing the ravages which time effects in the human frame. It is a secret which has been handed down for many generations in the family of the original proprietor. Its success is frequently remarkable, and its absolute failure is impossible. It is not a drug, it is not a cosmetic, yet it contains the properties of both. It is agreeable and soothing to use, and being best administered during the hours of sleep does not interfere with the ordinary avocations of every-day life. The price is so moderate—ten and sixpence, including the Government stamp—that it could only prove remunerative with an enormous sale. If you—ah, on behalf of your friend!—would care to purchase a bottle, I shall be most happy to explain its operation.'

Mr Pringle laid a half sovereign and a sixpence on the table, and the secretary, diving into a large packing-case which stood on one side, extracted a parcel. This contained a cardboard box adorned with a representation of Blake's preposterous illustration to 'The Grave', in which a centenarian on crutches is hobbling into a species of banker's strongroom with a rocky top, whereon is seated a youth clothed in nothing, and with an ecstatic expression.

'This,' said Mr Jacobs impressively, 'is the entire apparatus!' And he opened the box, displaying a moderate-sized phial and a spirit-lamp with a little tin dish attached. 'On retiring to rest, a teaspoonful of the contents of the bottle is poured into the receptacle above the lamp, which is then lighted, and the preparation being vaporized is inhaled by the patient. It is best to concentrate the thoughts on some object of beauty whilst the delicious aroma soothes the patient to sleep.'

'But how does it act?' inquired the Major a trifle impatiently.

'In this way,' replied the imperturbable secretary. 'Remember that the appearance of age is largely due to wrinkles; that is to say, to the skin losing its elasticity and fulness—so true is it that beauty is only skin-deep.' Here he laughed gaily. 'The joints grow stiff from loss of their natural tone, the figure stoops, and the vital organs decline their functions from the same cause. In a word, old age is due to a loss of *elasticity*, and that is the very property which the "Rejuvenator" imparts to the system, if inhaled for a few hours daily.'

Mr Pringle diplomatically succeeded in maintaining his gravity while the merits of the "Rejuvenator" were expounded, and it was not until he had bidden Mr Jacobs a courteous farewell, and was safely outside the office, that he allowed the fastening of his moustache to be disturbed by an expansive grin.

About nine o'clock the same evening the housekeeper of the Barbican offices was returning from market, her thoughts centred on the savoury piece of fried fish she was carrying home for supper.

'Mrs Smith?' said a man's voice behind her, as she produced her latch-key.

'My name's 'Odges,' she replied unguardedly, dropping the key in her agitation.

'You're the housekeeper, aren't you?' said the stranger, picking up the key and handing it to her politely.

'Lor', sir! You did give me a turn,' she faltered.

'Very sorry, I'm sure. I only want to know where I can find Mr Jacobs, of the "Assyrian Rejuvenator Company".'

'Well, sir, he told me I wasn't to give his address to anyone. Not that I know it either, sir, for I always send the letters to Mr Weeks.'

'I'll see you're not found fault with. I know he won't

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mind your telling me.' A sovereign clinked against the latch-key in her palm.

For a second she hesitated, then her eye caught the glint of the gold, and she fell.

'All I know, sir, is that when Mr Jacobs is away I send the letters—and a rare lot there are—to Mr Newton Weeks, at the Northumberland Avenue Hotel.'

'Is he one of the firm?'

'I don't know, sir, but there's no one comes here but Mr Jacobs.'

'Thank you very much, and good night,' said the stranger; and he strode down Barbican, leaving Mrs Hodges staring at the coin in her hand as if doubting whether, like fairy gold, it might not disappear even as she gazed.

The next day Mr Jacobs received a letter at his hotel:

'April 7th

'Sir—My friend Col. Sandstream informs me he has communicated with the police, and has sworn an information against you in respect of the moneys you have obtained from him, as he alleges, by false pretences. Although I am convinced that his statements are true, a fact which I can more readily grasp after my interview with you today, I give you this warning in order that you may make your escape before it is too late. Do not misunderstand my motives; I have not the slightest desire to save you from the punishment you so richly deserve. I am simply anxious to rescue my old friend from the ridiculous position he will occupy before the world should he prosecute you.

Your obedient servant,

Joseph Parkins, Major.

Newton Weeks, Esq.,

Northumberland Avenue Hotel.'

Mr Jacobs read this declaration of war with very mixed feelings.

So his visitor of yesterday was the friend of Colonel

Sandstream! Obviously come to get up evidence against him. Knowing old dog, that Sandstream! But then how had they run him to earth? That looked as if the police had got their fingers in the pie. Mrs Hodges was discreet. She would never have given the address to any but the police. It was annoying, though, after all his precautions; seemed as if the game was really up at last. Well, it was bound to come some day, and he had been in tighter places before. He could hardly complain; the 'Rejuvenator' had been going very well lately. But suppose the whole thing was a plant—a dodge to intimidate him?

He read the letter through again. The writer had been careful to omit his address, but it seemed plausible enough on the face of it. Anyhow, whatever the major's real motive might be, he couldn't afford to neglect the warning, and the one clear thing was that London was an unhealthy place for him just at present. He would pack up, so as to be ready for all emergencies, and drive round to Barbican and reconnoitre. Then, if things looked fishy, he could go to Cannon Street and catch the 11.5 Continental. He'd show them that Harry Jacobs wasn't the man to be bluffed out of his claim!

Mr Jacobs stopped his cab some doors from the "Rejuvenator" office, and was in the act of alighting when he paused, spellbound at the apparition of Pringle. The latter was loitering outside No. 82, and as the cab drew up he ostentatiously consulted a large pocket-book, and glanced several times from its pages to the countenance of his victim as if comparing a description. Attired in a long overcoat, a bowler hat, and wearing thick boots of a constabulary pattern to the nervous imagination of Mr Jacobs, he afforded startling evidence of the police interest in the establishment; and this idea was confirmed when Pringle, as if satisfied with his scrutiny, drew a paper from the pocket-book and made a movement in his direction. Without

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waiting for further developments, Mr Jacobs retreated into the cab and hoarsely whispered through the trap-door, 'Cannon Street as hard as you can go!'

The cabman wrenched the horse's head round. He had been an interested spectator of the scene, and sympathised with the evident desire of his fare to escape what appeared to be the long arm of the law. At this moment a 'crawling' hansom came up, and was promptly hailed by Pringle.

'Follow that cab and don't lose it on any account!' he cried, as he stood on the step and pointed vigorously after the receding hansom.

While Mr Jacobs careered down Barbican, his cabman looked back in time to observe this expressive pantomime, and with the instinct of a true sportsman lashed the unfortunate brute into a hand-gallop. But the observant eye of a policeman checked this moderate exhibition of speed just as they were rounding the sharp corner into Aldersgate Street, and had not a lumbering railway van intervened Pringle would have caught him up and brought the farce to an awkward finish. But the van saved the situation. The moment's respite was all that the chase needed, and in response to the promises of largesse, frantically roared by Mr Jacobs through the trap-door, he was soon bounding and bumping over the wood pavement with Pringle well in the rear.

Then ensued a mad stampede down Aldersgate Street.

In and out, between the crowded files of vans and 'buses, the two cabs wound a zig-zag course; the horses slipping and skating over the greasy surface, or ploughing up the mud as their bits skidded them within inches of a collision. In vain did policemen roar to them to stop—the order fell on heedless ears. In vain did officious boys wave intimidating arms, or make futile grabs at the harness of the apparent runaways. Did a cart dart unexpectedly from out a side street, the inevitable disaster failed to come off.

Did an obstacle loom dead ahead of them, it melted into thin air as they approached. Triumphantlly they piloted the narrowest of straits, and dashed unscathed into St Martin's-le-Grand.

There was a block in Newgate Street, and the cross traffic was stopped. Mr Jacobs' hansom nipped through a temporary gap, grazing the pole of an omnibus, and being lustily anathematised in the process. But Pringle's cabman, attempting to follow, was imperiously waved back by a policeman.

'No go, I'm afraid, sir!' was the man's comment, as they crossed into St Paul's Churchyard after a three minutes' wait. 'I can't see him nowhere.'

'Never mind,' said Pringle cheerfully. 'Go to Charing Cross telegraph office.'

There he sent the following message:

'To Mrs Hodges, 82, Barbican. Called away to country. Mr Weeks will take charge of office—Jacobs.'

About two the same afternoon, Pringle, wearing the wig and moustache of Major Parkins, rang the housekeeper's bell at 82.

'I'm Mr Weeks,' he stated, as Mrs Hodges emerged from the bowels of the earth. 'Mr Jacobs has had to leave town, and has asked me to take charge of the office.'

'Oh yes, sir! I've had a telegram from Mr Jacobs to say so. You know the way up, I suppose.'

'I think so. But Mr Jacobs forgot to send me the office key.'

'I'd better lend you mine, then, sir, till you can hear from Mr Jacobs.' She fumbled in her voluminous pocket. 'I hope nothing's the matter with him?'

'Oh dear no! He found he needed a short holiday, that's all,' Pringle reassured her, and taking the key from the confiding woman he climbed to the second floor.

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Sitting down at the secretarial desk, he sent a quick glance round the office. A poor creature, that Jacobs, he reflected, for all his rascality, or he wouldn't have been scared so easily. And he drew a piece of wax from his pocket and took a careful impression of the key.

He had not been in possession of the 'Rejuvenator' offices for very long before he discovered that Mr Jacobs' desire to break out in a fresh place had proved abortive. It will be remembered that on the occasion of his interview with that gentleman, Mr Jacobs assumed that Pringle's visit had reference to 'Pelosia', whose virtues he extolled in a leaflet composed in his own very pronounced style. A large package in the office Pringle found to contain many thousands of these effusions, which had apparently been laid aside for some considerable time. From the absence in the daily correspondence of any inquiries thereafter, it was clear that the public had failed to realize the advantages of the internal administration of mud, so that Mr Jacobs had been forced to stick to the swindle that was already in existence. After all, the latter was a paying concern—eminently so! Besides, the patent-medicine trade is rather overdone.

The price of the 'Assyrian Rejuvenator' was such as to render the early cashing of remittances an easy matter. Ten-and-sixpence being a sum for which the average banker demurs to honour a cheque, the payments were usually made in postal orders; and Pringle acquired a larger faith in Carlyle's opinion of the majority of his fellow-creatures as he cashed the previous day's takings at the General Post Office on his way up to Barbican each morning. The business was indeed a flourishing one, and his satisfaction was only alloyed by the probability of some legal interference, at the instance of Colonel Sandstream, with the further operations of the Company. But for the present Fortune smiled, and Pringle continued

energetically to despatch parcels of the 'Rejuvenator' in response to the daily shower of postal orders. In this indeed he had little trouble, for he had found many gross of parcels duly packed and ready for posting.

One day while engaged in the process, which had grown quite a mechanical one by that time, he listened absently to a slow but determined step which ascended the stairs and paused on the landing outside. Above, on the third floor, was an importer of cigars made in Germany, and the visitor evidently delayed the further climb until he had regained his wind. Presently, after a preliminary pant or two, he got under weigh again, but proceeded only as far as the 'Rejuvenator' door, to which he gave a peremptory thump, and, opening it, walked in without further ceremony.

There was no need for him to announce himself. Pringle recognized him at first glance, although he had never seen him since the eventful evening at Cristiani's restaurant.

'I'm Colonel Sandstream!' he growled, looking round him savagely.

'Delighted to see you, sir,' said Pringle with assurance. 'Pray be seated,' he added politely.

'Who am I speaking to?'

'My name is Newton Weeks. I am——'

'I don't want to see *you*!' interrupted the Colonel testily.

'I want to see the secretary of this concern. I've no time to waste either.'

'I regret to say that Mr Jacobs——'

'Ah, yes! That's the name. Where is he?' again interrupted the old gentleman.

'Mr Jacobs is at present out of town.'

'Well, I'm not going to run after him. When will he be here again?'

'It is quite impossible for me to tell. But I was just now going to say that as the managing director of the company I am also acting as secretary during Mr Jacobs' absence.'

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‘What do you say your name is?’ demanded the other, still ignoring the chair which Pringle had offered him.

‘Newton Weeks.’

‘Newton Weeks,’ repeated the Colonel, making a note of the name on the back of an envelope.

‘Managing director,’ added Pringle suavely.

‘Well, Mr Weeks, if you represent the *company*—’ this with a contemptuous glance from the middle of the room at his surroundings—‘I’ve called with reference to a letter you’ve had the impertinence to send me.’

‘What was the date of it?’ inquired Pringle innocently.

‘I don’t remember!’ snapped the Colonel.

‘May I ask what was the subject of the correspondence?’

‘Why, this confounded “Rejuvenator” of yours, of course!’

‘You see we have a very large amount of correspondence concerning the “Rejuvenator”, and I’m afraid unless you have the letter with you——’

‘I’ve lost it or mislaid it somewhere.’

‘That is unfortunate! Unless you can remember the contents I fear it will be quite impossible for *me* to do so.’

‘I remember them well enough! I’m not likely to forget them in a hurry. I asked you to return me the money your “Rejuvenator”, as you call it, has cost me, because it’s been quite useless, and in your reply you not only refused absolutely, but hinted that I dare not prosecute you.’

As Pringle made no reply, he continued more savagely: ‘Would you like to hear my candid opinion of you?’

‘We are always pleased to hear the opinion of our clients.’

Pringle’s calmness only appeared to exasperate the Colonel the more.

‘Well, sir, you shall have it. I consider that letter the most impudent attempt at blackmail that I have ever heard of!’ He ground out the words from between his clenched teeth in a voice of concentrated passion.

'Blackmail!' echoed Pringle, allowing an expression of horror to occupy his countenance.

'Yes, sir! Blackmail!' asseverated the Colonel, nodding his head vigorously.

'Of course,' said Pringle, with a deprecating gesture, 'I am aware that some correspondence has passed between us, but I cannot attempt to remember every word of it. At the same time, although you are pleased to put such an unfortunate construction upon it, I am sure there is some misunderstanding in the matter. I must positively decline to admit that there has been any attempt on the part of the company of such a nature as you allege.'

'Oh! so you don't admit it, don't you? Perhaps you won't admit taking pounds and pounds of my money for your absurd concoction, which hasn't done me the least little bit of good in the world—nor ever will! And perhaps you won't admit refusing to return me my money? Eh? Perhaps you won't admit daring me to take proceedings because it would show up what an ass I've been! Don't talk to me, sir! Haugh!'

'I'm really very sorry that this unpleasantness has arisen,' began Pringle, 'but——'

'Pleasant or unpleasant, sir, I'm going to stop your little game! I mislaid your letter or I'd have called upon you before this. As you're the managing director I'm better pleased to see you than your precious secretary. Anyhow, I've come to tell you that you're a set of swindlers! Of swindlers, sir!'

'I can make every allowance for your feelings,' said Pringle, drawing himself up with an air of pained dignity, 'but I regret to see a holder of His Majesty's commission so deficient in self-control.'

'Like your impertinence, sir!' vociferated the veteran. 'I'll let the money go, and I'll prosecute the pair of you, no matter what it costs me! Yes, you, and your rascally

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secretary too! I'll go and swear an information against you this very day!' He bounced out of the room, and explosively snorted downstairs.

Pringle followed in the rear, and reached the outer door in time to hear him exclaim, 'Mansion House Police Court,' to the driver of a motor-cab, in which he appropriately clanked and rumbled out of sight.

Returning upstairs, Pringle busied himself in making a bonfire of the last few days' correspondence. Then, collecting the last batch of postal orders, he proceeded to cash them at the General Post Office, and walked back to Furnival's Inn. After all, the farce couldn't have lasted much longer.

Arrived at Furnival's Inn, Pringle rapidly divested himself of the wig and moustache, and, assuming his official port-wine mark, became once more the unemployed literary agent.

It was now half-past one, and, after lunching lightly at a near restaurant, he lighted a cigar and strolled leisurely eastward.

By the time he reached Barbican three o'clock was reverberating from St Paul's. He entered the private bar of a tavern nearly opposite, and sat down by a window which commanded a view of No. 82.

As time passed and the quarters continued to strike in rapid succession, Pringle felt constrained to order further refreshment; and he was lighting a third cigar before his patience was rewarded. Happening to glance up at the second floor window, he caught a glimpse of a strange man engaged in taking a momentary survey of the street below.

The march of events had been rapid. He had evidently resigned the secretaryship not a moment too soon!

Not long after the strange face had disappeared from the window, a four-wheeled cab stopped outside the tavern, and an individual wearing a pair of large blue spectacles,

and carrying a Gladstone bag, got out and carefully scrutinized the offices of the 'Rejuvenator'. Mr Jacobs, for it was he, did not intend to be caught napping this time.

At length, being satisfied with the normal appearance of the premises, he crossed the road, and to Pringle's intense amusement, disappeared into the house opposite. The spectator had not long to wait for the next act of the drama.

About ten minutes after Mr Jacobs' disappearance, the man who had looked out of the window emerged from the house and beckoned to the waiting cab. As it drew up at the door, a second individual came down the steps, fast-holding Mr Jacobs by the arm. The latter, in very crest-fallen guise, re-entered the vehicle, being closely followed by his captor; and the first man having taken his seat with them, the party adjourned to a destination as to which Pringle had no difficulty in hazarding a guess. Satisfying the barmaid, he sallied into the street. The 'Rejuvenator' offices seemed once more to be deserted, and the postman entered in the course of his afternoon round. Pringle walked a few yards up the street and then, crossing as the postman re-appeared, turned back and entered the house boldly. Softly mounting the stairs, he knocked at the door. There was no response. He knocked again more loudly, and finally turned the handle. As he expected, it was locked securely, and, satisfied that the coast was clear, he inserted his own replica of the key and entered. The books tumbled on the floor in confused heaps, the wide-open and empty drawers, and the overturned packing-cases, showed how thoroughly the place had been ransacked in the search for compromising evidence. But Pringle took no further interest in these things. The letter-box was the sole object of his attention. He tore open the batch of newly-delivered letters, and crammed the postal orders into his pockets; then,

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secreting the correspondence behind a rifled packing-case, he silently locked the door.

As he strolled down the street, on a last visit to the General Post Office, the two detectives passed him on their way back in quest of the 'Managing Director'.

VI

Madame Sara

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Everyone in trade and a good many who are not have heard of Werner's Agency, the Solvency Inquiry Agency for all British trade. Its business is to know the financial condition of all wholesale and retail firms, from Rothschild's to the smallest sweetstuff shop in Whitechapel. I do not say that every firm figures on its books, but by methods of secret inquiry it can discover the status of any firm or individual. It is the great safeguard to British trade and prevents much fraudulent dealing.

Of this agency I, Dixon Druce, was appointed manager in 1890. Since then I have met queer people and seen strange sights, for men do curious things for money in this world.

It so happened that in June, 1899, my business took me to Madeira on an inquiry of some importance. I left the island on the 14th of the month by the *Norham Castle* for Southampton. I embarked after dinner. It was a lovely night, and the strains of the band in the public gardens of Funchal came floating across the star-powdered bay through the warm, balmy air. Then the engine bells rang to 'Full speed ahead', and, flinging a farewell to the fairest

island on earth, I turned to the smoking-room in order to light my cheroot.

‘Do you want a match, sir?’

The voice came from a slender, young-looking man who stood near the taffrail. Before I could reply he had struck one and held it out to me.

‘Excuse me,’ he said, as he tossed it overboard, ‘but surely I am addressing Mr Dixon Druce?’

‘You are, sir,’ I said, glancing keenly back at him, ‘but you have the advantage of me.’

‘Don’t you know me?’ he responded, ‘Jack Selby, Hayward’s House, Harrow, 1879.’

‘By Jove! so it is,’ I cried.

Our hands met in a warm clasp, and a moment later I found myself sitting close to my old friend, who had fagged for me in the bygone days, and whom I had not seen from the moment when I said goodbye to the ‘Hill’ in the grey mist of a December morning twenty years ago. He was a boy of fourteen then, but nevertheless I recognised him. His face was bronzed and good-looking, his features refined. As a boy Selby had been noted for his grace, his well-shaped head, his clean-cut features; these characteristics still were his, and although he was now slightly past his first youth he was decidedly handsome. He gave me a quick sketch of his history.

‘My father left me plenty of money,’ he said, ‘and The Meadows, our old family place, is now mine. I have a taste for natural history; that taste took me two years ago to South America. I have had my share of strange adventures, and have collected valuable specimens and trophies. I am now on my way home from Para, on the Amazon, having come by a Booth boat to Madeira and changed there to the Castle Line. But why all this talk about myself?’ he added, bringing his deck chair a little nearer to mine. ‘What about your history, old chap? Are you settled down

with a wife and kiddies of your own, or is that dream of your school days fulfilled, and are you the owner of the best private laboratory in London?’

‘As to the laboratory,’ I said, with a smile, ‘you must come and see it. For the rest I am unmarried. Are you?’

‘I was married the day before I left Para, and my wife is on board with me.’

‘Capital,’ I answered. ‘Let me hear all about it.’

‘You shall. Her maiden name was Dallas; Beatrice Dallas. She is just twenty now. Her father was an Englishman and her mother a Spaniard; neither parent is living. She has an elder sister, Edith, nearly thirty years of age, unmarried, who is on board with us. There is also a step-brother, considerably older than either Edith or Beatrice. I met my wife last year in Para, and at once fell in love. I am the happiest man on earth. It goes without saying that I think her beautiful, and she is also very well off. The story of her wealth is a curious one. Her uncle on the mother’s side was an extremely wealthy Spaniard, who made an enormous fortune in Brazil out of diamonds and minerals; he owned several mines. But it is supposed that his wealth turned his brain. At any rate, it seems to have done so as far as the disposal of his money went. He divided the yearly profits and interest between his nephew and his two nieces, but declared that the property itself should never be split up. He has left the whole of it to that one of the three who should survive the others. A perfectly insane arrangement, but not, I believe, unprecedented in Brazil.’

‘Very insane,’ I echoed. ‘What was he worth?’

‘Over two million sterling.’

‘By Jove!’ I cried, ‘what a sum! But what about the half-brother?’

‘He must be over forty years of age, and is evidently a bad lot. I have never seen him. His sisters won’t speak to him or have anything to do with him. I understand that

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he is a great gambler; I am further told that he is at present in England, and, as there are certain technicalities to be gone through before the girls can fully enjoy their incomes, one of the first things I must do when I get home is to find him out. He has to sign certain papers, for we shan't be able to put things straight until we get his whereabouts. Some time ago my wife and Edith heard that he was ill, but dead or alive we must know all about him, and as quickly as possible.'

I made no answer, and he continued:

'I'll introduce you to my wife and sister-in-law tomorrow. Beatrice is quite a child compared to Edith, who acts towards her almost like a mother. Bee is a little beauty, so fresh and round and young-looking. But Edith is handsome, too, although I sometimes think she is as vain as a peacock. By the way, Druce, this brings me to another part of my story. The sisters have an acquaintance on board, one of the most remarkable women I have ever met. She goes by the name of Madame Sara, and knows London well. In fact, she confesses to having a shop in the Strand. What she has been doing in Brazil I do not know, for she keeps all her affairs strictly private. But you will be amazed when I tell you what her calling is.'

'What?' I asked.

'A professional beautifier. She claims the privilege of restoring youth to those who consult her. She also declares that she can make quite ugly people handsome. There is no doubt that she is very clever. She knows a little bit of everything, and has wonderful recipes with regard to medicines, surgery, and dentistry. She is a most lovely woman herself, very fair, with blue eyes, an innocent, childlike manner, and quantities of rippling gold hair. She openly confesses that she is very much older than she appears. She looks about five-and-twenty. She seems to have travelled all over the world, and says that by birth

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she is a mixture of Indian and Italian, her father having been Italian and her mother Indian. Accompanying her is an Arab, a handsome, picturesque sort of fellow, who gives her the most absolute devotion, and she is also bringing back to England two Brazilians from Para. This woman deals in all sorts of curious secrets, but principally in cosmetics. Her shop in the Strand could, I fancy, tell many a strange history. Her clients go to her there, and she does what is necessary for them. It is a fact that she occasionally performs small surgical operations, and there is not a dentist in London who can vie with her. She confesses quite naively that she holds some secrets for making false teeth cling to the palate that no one knows of. Edith Dallas is devoted to her—in fact, her adoration amounts to idolatry.'

'You give a very brilliant account of this woman,' I said. 'You must introduce me tomorrow.'

'I will,' answered Jack, with a smile. 'I should like your opinion of her. I am right glad I have met you, Druce, it is like old times. When we get to London I mean to put up at my town house in Eaton Square for the remainder of the season. The Meadows shall be re-furnished, and Bee and I will take up our quarters some time in August; then you must come and see us. But I am afraid before I give myself up to mere pleasure I must find that precious brother-in-law, Henry Joachim Silva.'

'If you have any difficulty apply to me,' I said. 'I can put at your disposal, in an unofficial way, of course, agents who would find almost any man in England, dead or alive.'

I then proceeded to give Selby a short account of my own business.

'Thanks,' he said presently, 'that is capital. You are the very man we want.'

The next morning after breakfast Jack introduced me to his wife and sister-in-law. They were both foreign-looking,

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but very handsome, and the wife in particular had a graceful and uncommon appearance.

We had been chatting about five minutes when I saw coming down the deck a slight, rather small woman, wearing a big sun hat.

'Ah, Madame,' cried Selby, 'here you are. I had the luck to meet an old friend on board—Mr Dixon Druce—and I have been telling him all about you. I should like you to know each other. Druce, this lady is Madame Sara, of whom I have spoken to you. Mr Dixon Druce—Madame Sara.'

She bowed gracefully and then looked at me earnestly. I had seldom seen a more lovely woman. By her side both Mrs Selby and her sister seemed to fade into insignificance. Her complexion was almost dazzlingly fair, her face refined in expression, her eyes penetrating, clever, and yet with the innocent, frank gaze of a child. Her dress was very simple; she looked altogether like a young, fresh, and natural girl.

As we sat chatting lightly and about commonplace topics, I instinctively felt that she took an interest in me even greater than might be expected upon an ordinary introduction. By slow degrees she so turned the conversation as to leave Selby and his wife and sister out, and then as they moved away she came a little nearer, and said in a low voice:

'I am very glad we have met, and yet how odd this meeting is! Was it really accidental?'

'I do not understand you,' I answered.

'I know who you are,' she said, lightly. 'You are the manager of Werner's Agency; its business is to know the private affairs of those people who would rather keep their own secrets. Now, Mr Druce, I am going to be absolutely frank with you. I own a small shop in the Strand—a perfumery shop—and behind those innocent-looking doors I

conduct the business which brings me in gold of the realm. Have you, Mr Druce, any objection to my continuing to make a livelihood in perfectly innocent ways?’

‘None whatever,’ I answered. ‘You puzzle me by alluding to the subject.’

‘I want you to pay my shop a visit when you come to London. I have been away for three or four months. I do wonders for my clients, and they pay me largely for my services. I hold some perfectly innocent secrets which I cannot confide to anybody. I have obtained them partly from the Indians and partly from the natives of Brazil. I have lately been in Para to inquire into certain methods by which my trade can be improved.’

‘And your trade is—?’ I said, looking at her with amusement and some surprise.

‘I am a beautifier,’ she said, lightly. She looked at me with a smile. ‘You don’t want me yet, Mr Druce, but the time may come when even you will wish to keep back the infirmities of years. In the meantime can you guess my age?’

‘I will not hazard a guess,’ I answered.

‘And I will not tell you. Let it remain a secret. Meanwhile, understand that my calling is quite an open one, and I do hold secrets. I should advise you, Mr Druce, even in your professional capacity, not to interfere with them.’

The childlike expression faded from her face as she uttered the last words. There seemed to ring a sort of challenge in her tone. She turned away after a few moments and I rejoined my friends.

‘You have been making acquaintance with Madame Sara, Mr Druce,’ said Mrs Selby. ‘Don’t you think she is lovely?’

‘She is one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen,’ I answered, ‘but there seems to be a mystery about her.’

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'Oh, indeed there is,' said Edith Dallas, gravely.

'She asked me if I could guess her age,' I continued. 'I did not try, but surely she cannot be more than five-and-twenty.'

'No one knows her age,' said Mrs Selby, 'but I will tell you a curious fact, which, perhaps, you will not believe. She was bridesmaid at my mother's wedding thirty years ago. She declares that she never changes, and has no fear of old age.'

'You mean that seriously?' I cried. 'But surely it is impossible?'

'Her name is on the register, and my mother knew her well. She was mysterious then, and I think my mother got into her power, but of that I am not certain. Anyhow, Edith and I adore her, don't we, Edie?'

She laid her hand affectionately on her sister's arm. Edith Dallas did not speak, but her face was careworn. After a time she said slowly:

'Madame Sara is uncanny and terrible.'

There is, perhaps, no business imaginable—not even a lawyer's—that engenders suspicions more than mine. I hate all mysteries—both in persons and things. Mysteries are my natural enemies; I felt now that this woman was a distinct mystery. That she was interested in me I did not doubt, perhaps because she was afraid of me.

The rest of the voyage passed pleasantly enough. The more I saw of Mrs Selby and her sister the more I liked them. They were quiet, simple, and straightforward. I felt sure that they were both as good as gold.

We parted at Waterloo, Jack and his wife and her sister going to Jack's house in Eaton Square, and I returning to my quarters in St John's Wood. I had a house there, with a long garden, at the bottom of which was my laboratory, the laboratory that was the pride of my life, it being, I fondly considered, the best private laboratory in London. There I

spent all my spare time making experiments and trying this chemical combination and the other, living in hopes of doing great things some day, for Werner's Agency was not to be the end of my career. Nevertheless, it interested me thoroughly, and I was not sorry to get back to my commercial conundrums.

The next day, just before I started to go to my place of business, Jack Selby was announced.

'I want you to help me,' he said. 'I have been already trying in a sort of general way to get information about my brother-in-law, but all in vain. There is no such person in any of the directories. Can you put me on the road to discovery?'

I said I could and would if he would leave the matter in my hands.

'With pleasure,' he replied. 'You see how we are fixed up. Neither Edith nor Bee can get money with any regularity until the man is found. I cannot imagine why he hides himself.'

'I will insert advertisements in the personal columns of the newspapers,' I said, 'and request anyone who can give information to communicate with me at my office. I will also give instructions to all the branches of my firm, as well as to my head assistants in London, to keep their eyes open for any news. You may be quite certain that in a week or two we shall know all about him.'

Selby appeared cheered at this proposal, and, having begged of me to call upon his wife and her sister as soon as possible, took his leave.

On that very day advertisements were drawn up and sent to several newspapers and inquiry agents; but week after week passed without the slightest result. Selby got very fidgety at the delay. He was never happy except in my presence, and insisted on my coming, whenever I had time, to his house. I was glad to do so, for I took an interest

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both in him and his belongings, and as to Madame Sara I could not get her out of my head. One day Mrs Selby said to me:

‘Have you ever been to see Madame? I know she would like to show you her shop and general surroundings.’

‘I did promise to call upon her,’ I answered, ‘but have not had time to do so yet.’

‘Will you come with me tomorrow morning?’ asked Edith Dallas, suddenly.

She turned red as she spoke, and the worried, uneasy expression became more marked on her face. I had noticed for some time that she had been looking both nervous and depressed. I had first observed this peculiarity about her on board the *Norham Castle*, but, as time went on, instead of lessening it grew worse. Her face for so young a woman was haggard; she started at each sound, and Madame Sara’s name was never spoken in her presence without her evincing almost undue emotion.

‘Will you come with me?’ she said, with great eagerness.

I immediately promised, and the next day, about eleven o’clock, Edith Dallas and I found ourselves in a hansom driving to Madame Sara’s shop. We reached it in a few minutes, and found an unpretentious little place wedged in between a hosier’s on one side and a cheap print-seller’s on the other. In the windows of the shop were pyramids of perfume bottles, with scintillating facet stoppers tied with coloured ribbons. We stepped out of the hansom and went indoors. Inside the shop were a couple of steps, which led to a door of solid mahogany.

‘This is the entrance to her private house,’ said Edith, and she pointed to a small brass plate, on which was engraved the name—‘Madame Sara, Parfumeuse’.

Edith touched an electric bell and the door was immediately opened by a smartly-dressed page-boy. He looked at Miss Dallas as if he knew her very well, and said:

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‘Madame is within, and is expecting you, miss.’

He ushered us both into a quiet-looking room, soberly but handsomely furnished. He left us, closing the door. Edith turned to me.

‘Do you know where we are?’ she asked.

‘We are standing at present in a small room just behind Madame Sara’s shop,’ I answered. ‘Why are you so excited, Miss Dallas? What is the matter with you?’

‘We are on the threshold of a magician’s cave,’ she replied. ‘We shall soon be face to face with the most marvellous woman in the whole of London. There is no one like her.’

‘And you—fear her?’ I said, dropping my voice to a whisper.

She started, stepped back, and with great difficulty recovered her composure. At that moment the page-boy returned to conduct us through a series of small waiting-rooms, and we soon found ourselves in the presence of Madame herself.

‘Ah!’ she said, with a smile. ‘This is delightful. You have kept your word, Edith, and I am greatly obliged to you. I will now show Mr Druce some of the mysteries of my trade. But understand, sir,’ she added, ‘that I shall not tell you any of my real secrets, only as you would like to know something about me you shall.’

‘How can you tell I should like to know about you?’ I asked.

She gave me an earnest glance which somewhat astonished me, and then she said:

‘Knowledge is power; don’t refuse what I am willing to give. Edith, you will not object to waiting here while I show Mr Druce through the rooms. First observe this room, Mr Druce. It is lighted only from the roof. When the door shuts it automatically locks itself, so that any intrusion from without is impossible. This is my sanctum

sanctorum—a faint odour of perfume pervades the room. This is a hot day, but the room itself is cool. What do you think of it all?’

I made no answer. She walked to the other end and motioned to me to accompany her. There stood a polished oak square table, on which lay an array of extraordinary-looking articles and implements—stoppered bottles full of strange medicaments, mirrors, plane and concave, brushes, sprays, sponges, delicate needle-pointed instruments of bright steel, tiny lancets, and forceps. Facing this table was a chair, like those used by dentists. Above the chair hung electric lights in powerful reflectors, and lenses like bull’s-eye lanterns. Another chair, supported on a glass pedestal, was kept there, Madame Sara informed me, for administering static electricity. There were dry-cell batteries for the continuous currents and induction coils for Faradic currents. There were also platinum needles for burning out the roots of hairs.

Madame took me from this room into another, where a still more formidable array of instruments was to be found. Here were a wooden operating table and chloroform and ether apparatus. When I had looked at everything, she turned to me.

‘Now you know,’ she said. ‘I am a doctor—perhaps a quack. These are my secrets. By means of these I live and flourish.’

She turned her back on me and walked into the other room with the light, springy step of youth. Edith Dallas, white as a ghost, was waiting for us.

‘You have done your duty, my child,’ said Madame. ‘Mr Druce has seen just what I want him to see. I am very much obliged to you both. We shall meet tonight at Lady Farringdon’s “At Home”. Until then, farewell.’

When we got into the street and were driving back again to Eaton Square, I turned to Edith.

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'Many things puzzle me about your friend,' I said, 'but perhaps none more than this. By what possible means can a woman who owns to being the possessor of a shop obtain the entrée to some of the best houses in London? Why does Society open her doors to this woman, Miss Dallas?'

'I cannot quite tell you,' was her reply. 'I only know the fact that wherever she goes she is welcomed and treated with consideration, and wherever she fails to appear there is a universally expressed feeling of regret.'

I had also been invited to Lady Farrington's reception that evening, and I went there in a state of great curiosity. There was no doubt that Madame interested me. I was not sure of her. Beyond doubt there was a mystery attached to her, and also, for some unaccountable reason, she wished both to propitiate and defy me. Why was this?

I arrived early, and was standing in the crush near the head of the staircase when Madame was announced. She wore the richest white satin and quantities of diamonds. I saw her hostess bend towards her and talk eagerly. I noticed Madame's reply and the pleased expression that crossed Lady Farrington's face. A few minutes later a man with a foreign-looking face and long beard sat down before the grand piano. He played a light prelude and Madame Sara began to sing. Her voice was sweet and low, with an extraordinary pathos in it. It was the sort of voice that penetrates to the heart. There was an instant pause in the gay chatter. She sang amidst perfect silence, and when the song had come to an end there followed a furore of applause. I was just turning to say something to my nearest neighbour when I observed Edith Dallas, who was standing close by. Her eyes met mine; she laid her hand on my sleeve.

'The room is hot,' she said, half panting as she spoke. 'Take me out on the balcony.'

I did so. The atmosphere of the reception-rooms was

Madame Sara

almost intolerable, but it was comparatively cool in the open air.

‘I must not lose sight of her,’ she said, suddenly.

‘Of whom?’ I asked, somewhat astonished at her words.

‘Of Sara.’

‘She is there,’ I said. ‘You can see her from where you stand.’

We happened to be alone. I came a little closer.

‘Why are you afraid of her?’ I asked.

‘Are you sure that we shall not be heard?’ was her answer.

‘She terrifies me,’ were her next words.

‘I will not betray your confidence, Miss Dallas. Will you not trust me? You ought to give me a reason for your fears.’

‘I cannot—I dare not; I have said far too much already. Don’t keep me, Mr Druce. She must not find us together.’

As she spoke she pushed her way through the crowd, and before I could stop her was standing by Madame Sara’s side.

The reception in Portland Place was, I remember, on the 26th of July. Two days later the Selbys were to give their final ‘At Home’ before leaving for the country. I was, of course, invited to be present, and Madame was also there. She had never been dressed more splendidly, nor had she ever before looked younger or more beautiful. Wherever she went all eyes followed her. As a rule her dress was simple, almost like what a girl would wear, but tonight she chose rich Oriental stuffs made of many colours, and absolutely glittering with gems. Her golden hair was studded with diamonds. Round her neck she wore turquoise and diamonds mixed. There were many younger women in the room, but not the youngest nor the fairest had a chance beside Madame. It was not mere beauty of appearance, it was charm—charm which carries all before it.

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I saw Miss Dallas, looking slim and tall and pale, standing at a little distance. I made my way to her side. Before I had time to speak she bent towards me.

'Is she not divine?' she whispered. 'She bewilders and delights everyone. She is taking London by storm.'

'Then you are not afraid of her tonight?' I said.

'I fear her more than ever. She has cast a spell over me. But listen, she is going to sing again.'

I had not forgotten the song that Madame had given us at the Farringdons', and stood still to listen. There was a complete hush in the room. Her voice floated over the heads of the assembled guests in a dreamy Spanish song. Edith told me that it was a slumber song, and that Madame boasted of her power of putting almost anyone to sleep who listened to her rendering of it.

'She has many patients who suffer from insomnia,' whispered the girl, 'and she generally cures them with that song, and that alone. Ah! we must not talk; she will hear us.'

Before I could reply Selby came hurrying up. He had not noticed Edith. He caught me by the arm.

'Come just for a minute into this window, Dixon,' he said. 'I must speak to you. I suppose you have no news with regard to my brother-in-law?'

'Not a word,' I answered.

'To tell you the truth, I am getting terribly put out over the matter. We cannot settle any of our money affairs just because this man chooses to lose himself. My wife's lawyers wired to Brazil yesterday, but even his bankers do not know anything about him.'

'The whole thing is a question of time,' was my answer. 'When are you off to Hampshire?'

'On Saturday.'

As Selby said the last words he looked around him, then he dropped his voice.

Madame Sara

'I want to say something else. The more I see—' he nodded towards Madame Sara—'the less I like her. Edith is getting into a very strange state. Have you not noticed it? And the worst of it is my wife is also infected. I suppose it is that dodge of the woman's for patching people up and making them beautiful. Doubtless the temptation is overpowering in the case of a plain woman, but Beatrice is beautiful herself and young. What can she have to do with cosmetics and complexion pills?'

'You don't mean to tell me that your wife has consulted Madame Sara as a doctor?'

'Not exactly, but she has gone to her about her teeth. She complained of toothache lately, and Madame's dentistry is renowned. Edith is constantly going to her for one thing or another, but then Edith is infatuated.'

As Jack said the last words he went over to speak to someone else, and before I could leave the seclusion of the window I perceived Edith Dallas and Madame Sara in earnest conversation together. I could not help overhearing the following words:

'Don't come to me tomorrow. Get into the country as soon as you can. It is far and away the best thing to do.'

As Madame spoke she turned swiftly and caught my eye. She bowed, and the peculiar look, the sort of challenge, she had given me before flashed over her face. It made me uncomfortable, and during the night that followed I could not get it out of my head. I remembered what Selby had said with regard to his wife and her money affairs. Beyond doubt he had married into a mystery—a mystery that Madame knew all about. There was a very big money interest, and strange things happen when millions are concerned.

The next morning I had just risen and was sitting at breakfast when a note was handed to me. It came by special

messenger, and was marked 'Urgent'. I tore it open. These were its contents:

'My dear Druce, A terrible blow has fallen on us. My sister-in-law, Edith, was taken suddenly ill this morning at breakfast. The nearest doctor was sent for, but he could do nothing, as she died half an hour ago. Do come and see me, and if you know any very clever specialist bring him with you. My wife is utterly stunned by the shock. Yours, Jack Selby.'

I read the note twice before I could realize what it meant. Then I rushed out and, hailing the first hansom I met, said to the man:

'Drive to No. 192, Victoria Street, as quickly as you can.'

Here lived a certain Mr Eric Vandeleur, an old friend of mine and the police surgeon for the Westminster district, which included Eaton Square. No shrewder or sharper fellow existed than Vandeleur, and the present case was essentially in his province, both legally and professionally. He was not at his flat when I arrived, having already gone down to the court. Here I accordingly hurried, and was informed that he was in the mortuary.

For a man who, as it seemed to me, lived in a perpetual atmosphere of crime and violence, of death and coroners' courts, his habitual cheerfulness and brightness of manner were remarkable. Perhaps it was only the reaction from his work, for he had the reputation of being one of the most astute experts of the day in medical jurisprudence, and the most skilled analyst in toxicological cases on the Metropolitan Police staff. Before I could send him word that I wanted to see him I heard a door bang, and Vandeleur came hurrying down the passage, putting on his coat as he rushed along.

'Halloa!' he cried. 'I haven't seen you for ages. Do you want me?'

'Yes, very urgently,' I answered. 'Are you busy?'

Madame Sara

'Head over ears, my dear chap. I cannot give you a moment now, but perhaps later on.'

'What is it? You look excited.'

'I have got to go to Eaton Square like the wind, but come along, if you like, and tell me on the way.'

'Capital,' I cried. 'The thing has been reported then? You are going to Mr Selby's, No. 84a; then I am going with you.'

He looked at me in amazement.

'But the case has only just been reported. What can you possibly know about it?'

'Everything. Let us take this hansom, and I will tell you as we go along.'

As we drove to Eaton Square I quickly explained the situation, glancing now and then at Vandeleur's bright, clean-shaven face. He was no longer Eric Vandeleur, the man with the latest club story and the merry twinkle in his blue eyes: he was Vandeleur the medical jurist, with a face like a mask, his lower jaw slightly protruding and features very fixed.

'The thing promises to be serious,' he replied, as I finished, 'but I can do nothing until after the autopsy. Here we are, and there is my man waiting for me; he has been smart.'

On the steps stood an official-looking man in uniform, who saluted.

'Coroner's officer,' explained Vandeleur.

We entered the silent, darkened house. Selby was standing in the hall. He came to meet us. I introduced him to Vandeleur, and he at once led us into the dining-room, where we found Dr Osborne, whom Selby had called in when the alarm of Edith's illness had been first given. Dr Osborne was a pale, under-sized, very young man. His face expressed considerable alarm. Vandeleur, however, managed to put him completely at his ease.

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'I will have a chat with you in a few minutes, Dr Osborne, he said; 'but first I must get Mr Selby's report. Will you please tell me, sir, exactly what occurred?'

'Certainly,' he answered. 'We had a reception here last night, and my sister-in-law did not go to bed until early morning; she was in bad spirits, but otherwise in her usual health. My wife went into her room after she was in bed; and told me later on that she had found Edith in hysterics, and could not get her to explain anything. We both talked about taking her to the country without delay. Indeed, our intention was to get off this afternoon.'

'Well?' said Vandeleur.

'We had breakfast about half-past nine, and Miss Dallas came down, looking quite in her usual health, and in apparently good spirits. She ate with appetite, and, as it happened, she and my wife were both helped from the same dish. The meal had nearly come to an end when she jumped up from the table, uttered a sharp cry, turned very pale, pressed her hand to her side, and ran out of the room. My wife immediately followed her. She came back again in a minute or two, and said that Edith was in violent pain, and begged of me to send for a doctor. Dr Osborne lives just round the corner. He came at once, but she died almost immediately after his arrival.'

'You were in the room?' asked Vandeleur, turning to Osborne.

'Yes,' he replied. 'She was conscious to the last moment, and died suddenly.'

'Did she tell you anything?'

'No, except to assure me that she had not eaten any food that day until she had come down to breakfast. After the death occurred I sent immediately to report the case, locked the door of the room where the poor girl's body is, and saw also that nobody touched anything on this table.'

Vandeleur rang the bell and a servant appeared. He

Madame Sara

gave quick orders. The entire remains of the meal were collected and taken charge of, and then he and the coroner's officer went upstairs.

When we were alone Selby sank into a chair. His face was quite drawn and haggard.

'It is the horrible suddenness of the thing which is so appalling,' he cried. 'As to Beatrice, I don't believe she will ever be the same again. She was deeply attached to Edith. Edith was nearly ten years her senior, and always acted the part of mother to her. This is a sad beginning to our life. I can scarcely think collectedly.'

I remained with him a little longer, and then, as Vandeleur did not return, went back to my own house. There I could settle to nothing, and when Vandeleur rang me up on the telephone about six o'clock I hurried off to his rooms. As soon as I arrived I saw that Selby was with him, and the expression on both their faces told me the truth.

'This is a bad business,' said Vandeleur. 'Miss Dallas has died from swallowing poison. An exhaustive analysis and examination have been made, and a powerful poison, unknown to European toxicologists, has been found. This is strange enough, but how it has been administered is a puzzle. I confess, at the present moment, we are all non-plussed. It certainly was not in the remains of the breakfast, and we have her dying evidence that she took nothing else. Now, a poison with such appalling potency would take effect quickly. It is evident that she was quite well when she came to breakfast, and that the poison began to work towards the close of the meal. But how did she get it? This question, however, I shall deal with later on. The more immediate point is this. The situation is a serious one in view of the monetary issues and the value of the lady's life. From the aspects of the case, her undoubted sanity and her affection for her sister, we may almost exclude the idea of suicide. We must, therefore, call it

murder. This harmless, innocent lady is struck down by the hand of an assassin, and with such devilish cunning that no trace or clue is left behind. For such an act there must have been some very powerful motive, and the person who designed and executed it must be a criminal of the highest order of scientific ability. Mr Selby has been telling me the exact financial position of the poor lady, and also of his own young wife. The absolute disappearance of the step-brother, in view of his previous character, is in the highest degree strange. Knowing, as we do, that between him and two million sterling there stood two lives—one is taken!’

A deadly sensation of cold seized me as Vandeleur uttered these last words. I glanced at Selby. His face was colourless and the pupils of his eyes were contracted, as though he saw something which terrified him.

‘What happened once may happen again,’ continued Vandeleur. ‘We are in the presence of a great mystery, and I counsel you, Mr Selby, to guard your wife with the utmost care.’

These words, falling from a man of Vandeleur’s position and authority on such matters, were sufficiently shocking for me to hear, but for Selby to be given such a solemn warning about his young and beautiful and newly-married wife, who was all the world to him, was terrible indeed. He leant his head on his hands.

‘Mercy on us!’ he muttered. ‘Is this a civilized country when death can walk abroad like this, invisible, not to be avoided? Tell me, Mr Vandeleur, what I must do.’

‘You must be guided by me,’ said Vandeleur, ‘and, believe me, there is no witchcraft in the world. I shall place a detective in your household immediately. Don’t be alarmed; he will come to you in plain clothes and will simply act as a servant. Nevertheless, nothing can be done to your wife without his knowledge. As to you, Druce,’ he

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continued, turning to me, 'the police are doing all they can to find this man Silva, and I ask you to help them with your big agency, and to begin at once. Leave your friend to me. Wire instantly if you hear news.'

'You may rely on me,' I said, and a moment later I had left the room.

As I walked rapidly down the street the thought of Madame Sara, her shop and its mysterious background, its surgical instruments, its operating-table, its induction coils, came back to me. And yet what could Madame Sara have to do with the present strange, inexplicable mystery?

The thought had scarcely crossed my mind before I heard a clatter alongside the kerb, and turning round I saw a smart open carriage, drawn by a pair of horses, standing there. I also heard my own name. I turned. Bending out of the carriage was Madame Sara.

'I saw you going by, Mr Druce. I have only just heard the news about poor Edith Dallas. I am terribly shocked and upset. I have been to the house, but they would not admit me. Have you heard what was the cause of her death?'

Madame's blue eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

'I am not at liberty to disclose what I have heard, Madame,' I answered, 'since I am officially connected with the affair.'

Her eyes narrowed. The brimming tears dried as though by magic. Her glance became scornful.

'Thank you,' she answered, 'your reply tells me that she did not die naturally. How very appalling! But I must not keep you. Can I drive you anywhere?'

'No, thank you.'

'Goodbye, then.'

She made a sign to the coachman, and as the carriage rolled away turned to look at me. Her face wore the defiant expression I had seen there more than once. Could she be

connected with the affair? The thought came upon me with a violence that seemed almost conviction. Yet I had no reason for it—none.

To find Henry Joachim Silva was now my principal thought. My staff had instructions to make every possible inquiry, with large money rewards as incitements. The collateral branches of other agencies throughout Brazil were communicated with by cable, and all the Scotland Yard channels were used. Still there was no result. The newspapers took up the case; there were paragraphs in most of them with regard to the missing step-brother and the mysterious death of Edith Dallas. Then someone got hold of the story of the will, and this was retailed with many additions for the benefit of the public. At the inquest the jury returned the following verdict:

‘We find that Miss Edith Dallas died from taking poison of unknown name, but by whom or how administered there is no evidence to say.’

This unsatisfactory state of things was destined to change quite suddenly. On the 6th of August, as I was seated in my office, a note was brought me by a private messenger. It was as follows:

‘Norfolk Hotel, Strand.

‘Dear Sir—I have just arrived in London from Brazil, and have seen your advertisements. I was about to insert one myself in order to find the whereabouts of my sisters. I am a great invalid and unable to leave my room. Can you come to see me at the earliest possible moment? Yours, Henry Joachim Silva.’

In uncontrollable excitement I hastily dispatched two telegrams, one to Selby and the other to Vandeleur, begging of them to be with me, without fail, as soon as possible. So the man had never been in England at all. The situation

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was more bewildering than ever. One thing, at least, was probable—Edith Dallas's death was not due to her step-brother. Soon after half-past six Selby arrived, and Vandeleur walked in ten minutes later. I told them what had occurred and showed them the letter. In half an hour's time we reached the hotel, and on stating who I was we were shown into a room on the first floor by Silva's private servant. Resting in an armchair, as we entered, sat a man; his face was terribly thin. The eyes and cheeks were so sunken that the face had almost the appearance of a skull. He made no effort to rise when we entered, and glanced from one of us to the other with the utmost astonishment. I at once introduced myself and explained who we were. He then waved his hand for his man to retire.

'You have heard the news, of course, Mr Silva?' I said.

'News! What?' He glanced up to me and seemed to read something in my face. He started back in his chair.

'Good heavens,' he replied. 'Do you allude to my sisters? Tell me, quickly, are they alive?'

'Your elder sister died on the 29th of July, and there is every reason to believe that her death was caused by foul play.'

As I uttered these words the change that passed over his face was fearful to witness. He did not speak, but remained motionless. His claw-like hands clutched the arms of the chair, his eyes were fixed and staring, as though they would start from their hollow sockets, the colour of his skin was like clay. I heard Selby breathe quickly behind me, and Vandeleur stepped towards the man and laid his hand on his shoulder.

'Tell us what you know of this matter,' he said sharply.

Recovering himself with an effort, the invalid began in a tremulous voice:

'Listen closely, for you must act quickly. I am indirectly responsible for this fearful thing. My life has been

a wild and wasted one, and now I am dying. The doctors tell me I cannot live a month, for I have a large aneurism of the heart. Eighteen months ago I was in Rio. I was living fast and gambled heavily. Among my fellow-gamblers was a man much older than myself. His name was José Aranjo. He was, if anything, a greater gambler than I. One night we played alone. The stakes ran high until they reached a big figure. By daylight I had lost to him nearly £200,000. Though I am a rich man in point of income under my uncle's will, I could not pay a twentieth part of that sum. This man knew my financial position, and, in addition to a sum of £5,000 paid down, I gave him a document. I must have been mad to do so. The document was this—it was duly witnessed and attested by a lawyer—that, in the event of my surviving my two sisters and thus inheriting the whole of my uncle's vast wealth, half a million should go to José Aranjo. I felt I was breaking up at the time, and the chances of my inheriting the money were small. Immediately after the completion of the document this man left Rio, and I then heard a great deal about him that I had not previously known. He was a man of the queerest antecedents, partly Indian, partly Italian. He had spent many years of his life amongst the Indians. I heard also that he was as cruel as he was clever, and possessed some wonderful secrets of poisoning unknown to the West. I thought a great deal about this, for I knew that by signing that document I had placed the lives of my two sisters between him and a fortune. I came to Para six weeks ago, only to learn that one of my sisters was married and that both had gone to England. Ill as I was, I determined to follow them in order to warn them. I also wanted to arrange matters with you, Mr Selby.'

'One moment, sir,' I broke in, suddenly. 'Do you happen to be aware if this man, José Aranjo, knew a woman calling herself Madame Sara?'

Madame Sara

'Knew her?' cried Silva. 'Very well indeed, and so, for that matter, did I. Aranja and Madame Sara were the best friends, and constantly met. She called herself a professional beautifier—was very handsome, and had secrets for the pursuing of her trade unknown even to Aranja.'

'Good heavens!' I cried, 'and the woman is now in London. She returned here with Mrs Selby and Miss Dallas. Edith was very much influenced by her, and was constantly with her. There is no doubt in my mind that she is guilty. I have suspected her for some time, but I could not find a motive. Now the motive appears. You surely can have her arrested?'

Vandeleur made no reply. He gave me a strange look, then he turned to Selby.

'Has your wife also consulted Madame Sara?' he asked, sharply.

'Yes, she went to her once about her teeth, but has not been to the shop since Edith's death. I begged of her not to see the woman, and she promised me faithfully she would not do so.'

'Has she any medicines or lotions given to her by Madame Sara—does she follow any line of treatment advised by her?'

'No, I am certain on that point.'

'Very well. I will see your wife tonight in order to ask her some questions. You must both leave town at once. Go to your country house and settle there. I am quite serious when I say that Mrs Selby is in the utmost possible danger until after the death of her brother. We must leave you now, Mr Silva. All business affairs must wait for the present. It is absolutely necessary that Mrs Selby should leave London at once. Good night, sir. I shall give myself the pleasure of calling on you tomorrow morning.'

We took leave of the sick man. As soon as we got into the street Vandeleur stopped.

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'I must leave it to you, Selby,' he said, 'to judge how much of this matter you tell to your wife. Were I you I would explain everything. The time for immediate action has arrived, and she is a brave and sensible woman. From this moment you must watch all the foods and liquids that she takes. She must never be out of your sight or out of the sight of some other trustworthy companion.'

'I shall, of course, watch my wife myself,' said Selby. 'But the thing is enough to drive one mad.'

'I will go with you to the country, Selby,' I said, suddenly.

'Ah!' cried Vandeleur, 'that is the best thing possible, and what I wanted to propose. Go, all of you, by an early train tomorrow.'

'Then I will be off home at once, to make arrangements,' I said. 'I will meet you, Selby, at Waterloo for the first train to Crons Moor tomorrow.'

As I was turning away Vandeleur caught my arm.

'I am glad you are going with them,' he said. 'I shall write to you tonight re instructions. Never be without a loaded revolver. Good night.'

By 6.15 the next morning Selby, his wife, and I were in a reserved, locked, first-class compartment, speeding rapidly west. The servants and Mrs Selby's own special maid were in a separate carriage. Selby's face showed signs of a sleepless night, and presented a striking contrast to the fair, fresh face of the girl round whom this strange battle raged. Her husband had told her everything, and, though still suffering terribly from the shock and grief of her sister's death, her face was calm and full of repose.

A carriage was waiting for us at Crons Moor, and by half-past nine we arrived at the old home of the Selbys, nestling amid its oaks and elms. Everything was done to make the home-coming of the bride as cheerful as circumstances would permit, but a gloom, impossible to lift, overshadowed

Madame Sara

Selby himself. He could scarcely rouse himself to take the slightest interest in anything.

The following morning I received a letter from Vandeleur. It was very short, and once more impressed on me the necessity of caution. He said that two eminent physicians had examined Silva, and the verdict was that he could not live a month. Until his death precautions must be strictly observed.

The day was cloudless, and after breakfast I was just starting out for a stroll when the butler brought me a telegram. I tore it open; it was from Vandeleur.

'Prohibit all food until I arrive. Am coming down,' were the words. I hurried into the study and gave it to Selby. He read it and looked up at me.

'Find out the first train and go and meet him, old chap,' he said. 'Let us hope that this means an end of the hideous affair.'

I went into the hall and looked up the trains. The next arrived at Cronsmoor at 10.45. I then strolled round to the stables and ordered a carriage, after which I walked up and down on the drive. There was no doubt that something strange had happened. Vandeleur coming down so suddenly must mean a final clearing up of the mystery. I had just turned round at the lodge gates to wait for the carriage when the sound of wheels and of horses galloping struck on my ears. The gates were swung open, and Vandeleur in an open fly dashed through them. Before I could recover from my surprise he was out of the vehicle and at my side. He carried a small black bag in his hand.

'I came down by special train,' he said, speaking quickly. 'There is not a moment to lose. Come at once. Is Mrs Selby all right?'

'What do you mean?' I replied. 'Of course she is. Do you suppose that she is in danger?'

'Deadly,' was his answer. 'Come.'

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We dashed up to the house together. Selby, who had heard our steps, came to meet us.

‘Mr Vandeleur,’ he cried. ‘What is it? How did you come?’

‘By special train, Mr Selby. And I want to see your wife at once. It will be necessary to perform a very trifling operation.’

‘Operation!’ he exclaimed.

‘Yes; at once.’

We made our way through the hall and into the morning-room, where Mrs Selby was busily engaged reading and answering letters. She started up when she saw Vandeleur and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

‘What has happened?’ she asked.

Vandeleur went up to her and took her hand.

‘Do not be alarmed,’ he said, ‘for I have come to put all your fears to rest. Now, please, listen to me. When you visited Madame Sara with your sister, did you go for medical advice?’

The colour rushed into her face.

‘One of my teeth ached,’ she answered. ‘I went to her about that. She is, as I suppose you know, a most wonderful dentist. She examined the tooth, found that it required stopping, and got an assistant, a Brazilian, I think, to do it.’

‘And your tooth has been comfortable ever since?’

‘Yes, quite. She had one of Edith’s stopped at the same time.’

‘Will you kindly sit down and show me which was the tooth into which the stopping was put?’

She did so.

‘This was the one,’ she said, pointing with her finger to one in the lower jaw. ‘What do you mean? Is there anything wrong?’

Vandeleur examined the tooth long and carefully. There

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was a sudden rapid movement of his hand, and a sharp cry from Mrs Selby. With the deftness of long practice, and a powerful wrist, he had extracted the tooth with one wrench. The suddenness of the whole thing, startling as it was, was not so strange as his next movement.

'Send Mrs Selby's maid to her,' he said, turning to her husband; 'then come, both of you, into the next room.'

The maid was summoned. Poor Mrs Selby had sunk back in her chair, terrified and half fainting. A moment later Selby joined us in the dining-room.

'That's right,' said Vandeleur; 'close the door, will you?'

He opened his black bag and brought out several instruments. With one he removed the stopping from the tooth. It was quite soft and came away easily. Then from the bag he produced a small guinea-pig, which he requested me to hold. He pressed the sharp instrument into the tooth, and opening the mouth of the little animal placed the point on the tongue. The effect was instantaneous. The little head fell on to one of my hands—the guinea-pig was dead. Vandeleur was white as a sheet. He hurried up to Selby and wrung his hand.

'Thank heaven!' he said, 'I've been in time, but only just. Your wife is safe. This stopping would hardly have held another hour. I have been thinking all night over the mystery of your sister-in-law's death, and over every minute detail of evidence as to how the poison could have been administered. Suddenly the coincidence of both sisters having had their teeth stopped struck me as remarkable. Like a flash the solution came to me. The more I considered it the more I felt that I was right; but by what fiendish cunning such a scheme could have been conceived and executed is still beyond my power to explain. The poison is very like hyoscine, one of the worst toxic-alkaloids known, so violent in its deadly proportions that the amount that would go into a tooth would cause almost instant

death. It has been kept in by a gutta-percha stopping, certain to come out within a month, probably earlier, and most probably during mastication of food. The person would die either immediately or after a very few minutes, and no one would connect a visit to the dentist with a death a month afterwards.'

What followed can be told in a very few words. Madame Sara was arrested on suspicion. She appeared before the magistrate, looking innocent and beautiful, and managed during her evidence completely to baffle that acute individual. She denied nothing, but declared that the poison must have been put into the tooth by one of the two Brazilians whom she had lately engaged to help her with her dentistry. She had her suspicions with regard to these men soon afterwards, and had dismissed them. She believed that they were in the pay of José Arango, but she could not tell anything for certain. Thus Madame escaped conviction. I was certain that she was guilty, but there was not a shadow of real proof. A month later Silva died, and Selby is now a double millionaire.

VII

The Submarine Boat

Clifford Ashdown

Tric-trac! tric-trac! went the black and white discs as the players moved them over the backgammon board in expressive justification of the French term for the game. Tric-trac! They are indeed a nation of poets, reflected Mr Pringle. Was not Teuf-teuf! for the motor-car a veritable inspiration? And as he smoked, the not unmusical clatter of the enormous wooden discs filled the atmosphere.

In these days of cookery not entirely based upon air-tights—to use the expressive Americanism for tinned meats—it is no longer necessary for the man who wishes to dine, as distinguished from the mere feeding animal, to furtively seek some restaurant in remote Soho, jealously guarding its secret from his fellows. But Mr Pringle, in his favourite study of human nature, was an occasional visitor to the ‘Poissonière’ in Gerrard Street, and, the better to pursue his researches, had always denied familiarity with the foreign tongues he heard around him. The restaurant was distinctly close—indeed, some might have called it stuffy—and Pringle, though near a ventilator, thoughtfully provided by the management, was fast being lulled into drowsiness, when a man who had taken his seat with a companion at the next table leaned across the intervening gulf and addressed him.

‘Nous ne vous dérangeons pas, monsieur?’

Pringle, with a smile of fatuous uncomprehending, bowed, but said never a word.

‘Cochon d’Anglais, n’entendez-vous pas?’

‘I’m afraid I do not understand,’ returned Pringle, shaking his head hopelessly, but still smiling.

‘Canaille! Faut-il que je vous tire le nez?’ persisted the Frenchman, as, apparently still sceptical of Pringle’s assurance, he added threats to abuse.

‘I have known the English gentleman a long time, and without a doubt he does not understand French,’ testified the waiter who had now come forward for orders. Satisfied by this corroboration of Pringle’s innocence, the Frenchman bowed and smiled sweetly to him, and, ordering a bottle of Clos de Vougeot, commenced an earnest conversation with his neighbour.

By the time this little incident had closed, Pringle’s drowsiness had given place to an intense feeling of curiosity. For what purpose could the Frenchman have been so insistent in disbelieving his expressed ignorance of the language? Why, too, had he striven to make Pringle betray himself by resenting the insults showered upon him? In a Parisian restaurant, as he knew, far more trivial affronts had ended in meetings in the Bois de Boulogne. Besides, cochon was an actionable term of opprobrium in France. The Frenchman and his companion had seated themselves at the only vacant table, also it was in a corner; Pringle, at the next, was the single person within ear-shot, and the Frenchman’s extraordinary behaviour could only be due to a consuming thirst for privacy. Settling himself in an easy position, Pringle closed his eyes, and while appearing to resume his slumber, strained every nerve to discern the lightest word that passed at the next table. Dressed in the choicest mode of Piccadilly, the Frenchman bore himself with all the intolerable self-consciousness of the Boule-

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vardier; but there was no trace of good-natured levity in the dark aquiline features, and the evil glint of the eyes recalled visions of an operative Mephistopheles. His guest was unmistakably an Englishman of the bank-clerk type, who contributed his share of the conversation in halting Anglo-French, punctuated by nervous laughter as, with agonising pains, he dredged his memory for elusive colloquialisms.

Freely translated, this was what Pringle heard:

‘So your people have really decided to take up the submarine, after all?’

‘Yes; I am working out the details of some drawings in small-scale.’

‘But are they from headquarters?’

‘Certainly! Duly initialled and passed by the chief constructor.’

‘And you are making——’

‘Full working drawings.’

‘There will be no code or other secret about them?’

‘What I am doing can be understood by any naval architect.’

‘Ah, an English one!’

‘The measurements of course, are English, but they are easily convertible.’

‘You could do that?’

‘Too dangerous! Suppose a copy in metric scale were found in my possession! Besides, any draughtsman could reduce them in an hour or two.’

‘And when can you let me have it?’

‘In about two weeks.’

‘Impossible! I shall not be here.’

‘Unless something happens to let me get on with it quickly, I don’t see how I can do it even then. I am never sufficiently free from interruption to take tracings; there are far too many eyes upon me. The only chance I have is

to spoil the thing as soon as I have the salient points worked out on it, and after I have pretended to destroy it, smuggle it home; then I shall have to take elaborate notes every day and work out the details from them in the evening. It is simply impossible for me to attempt to take a finished drawing out of the yard, and, as it is, I don't quite see my way to getting the spoilt one out—they look so sharply after spoilt drawings.'

'Two weeks you say, then?'

'Yes; and I shall have to sit up most nights copying the day's work from my notes to do it.'

'Listen! In a week I must attend at the Ministry of Marine in Paris, but our military attaché is my friend. I can trust him; he shall come down to you.'

'What, at Chatham? Do you wish to ruin me?' A smile from the Frenchman. 'No; it must be in London, where no one knows me.'

'Admirable! My friend will be better able to meet you.'

'Very well, as soon as I am ready I will telegraph to you.'

'Might not the address of the embassy be remarked by the telegraph officials? Your English post-office is charmingly unsuspecting, but we must not risk anything.'

'Ah, perhaps so. Well, I will come up to London and telegraph to you from here. But your representative—will he be prepared for it?'

'I will warn him to expect it in fourteen days.' He made an entry in his pocket-book. 'How will you sign the message?'

'Gustave Zédé,' suggested the Englishman, sniggering for the first and only time.

'Too suggestive. Sign yourself "Pauline", and simply add the time.'

'"Pauline", then. Where shall the rendezvous be?'

'The most public place we can find.'

'Public?'

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'Certainly. Some place where everyone will be too much occupied with his own affairs to notice you. What say you to your Nelson's column? There you can wait in a way we shall agree upon.'

'It would be a difficult thing for me to wear a disguise.'

'All disguises are clumsy unless one is an expert. Listen! You shall be gazing at the statue with one hand in your breast—so.'

'Yes; and I might hold a "Baedeker" in my other hand.'

'Admirable, my friend! You have the true spirit of an artist,' sneered the Frenchman.

'Your representative will advance and say to me, "Pauline", and the exchange can be made without another word.'

'Exchange?'

'I presume your Government is prepared to pay me handsomely for the very heavy risks I am running in this matter,' said the Englishman stiffly.

'Pardon, my friend! How imbecile of me! I am authorised to offer you ten thousand francs.'

A pause, during which the Englishman made a calculation on the back of an envelope.

'That is four hundred pounds,' he remarked, tearing the envelope into carefully minute fragments. 'Far too little for such a risk.'

'Permit me to remind you, my friend, that you came in search of me, or rather of those I represent. You have something to sell? Good! But it is customary for the merchant to display his wares first.'

'I pledge myself to give you copies of the working drawings made for the use of the artificers themselves. I have already met you oftener than is prudent. As I say, you offer too little.'

'Should the drawings prove useless to us, we should, of course, return them to your Admiralty, explaining how

they came into our possession.' There was an unpleasant smile beneath the Frenchman's waxed moustache as he spoke. 'What sum do you ask?'

'Five hundred pounds in small notes—say, five pounds each.'

'That is—what do you say? Ah, twelve thousand five hundred francs! Impossible! My limit is twelve thousand.'

To this the Englishman at length gave an ungracious consent, and after some adroit compliments beneath which the other sought to bury his implied threat, the pair rose from the table. Either by accident or design, the Frenchman stumbled over the feet of Pringle, who, with his long legs stretching out from under the table, his head bowed and his lips parted, appeared in a profound slumber. Opening his eyes slowly, he feigned a lifelike yawn, stretched his arms, and gazed lazily around, to the entire satisfaction of the Frenchman, who, in the act of parting with his companion, was watching him from the door.

Calling for some coffee, Pringle lighted a cigarette, and reflected with a glow of indignant patriotism upon the sordid transaction he had become privy to. It is seldom that public servants are in this country found ready to betray their trust—with all honour be it recorded of them! But there ever exists the possibility of some under-paid official succumbing to the temptation at the command of the less scrupulous representatives of foreign powers, whose actions in this respect are always ignored officially by their superiors. To Pringle's somewhat cynical imagination, the sordid huckstering of a dockyard draughtsman with a French naval attaché appealed as corroboration of Walpole's famous principle, and as he walked homewards to Furnival's Inn, he determined, if possible, to turn his discovery to the mutual advantage of his country and himself—especially the latter.

During the next few days Pringle elaborated a plan of

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taking up a residence at Chatham, only to reject it as he had done many previous ones. Indeed, so many difficulties presented themselves to every single course of action, that the tenth day after found him strolling down Bond Street in the morning without having taken any further step in the matter. With his characteristic fastidious neatness in personal matters, he was bound for the Piccadilly establishment of the chief and, for West-Enders, the only firm of hatters in London.

'Breton Stret, do you noh?' said a voice suddenly. And Pringle, turning, found himself accosted by a swarthy foreigner.

'Bruton Street, n'est-ce pas?' Pringle suggested.

'Mais oui, Brrruten Stret, monsieur!' was the reply in faint echo of the English syllables.

'Le voila! à droite,' was Pringle's glib direction. Politely raising his hat in response to the other's salute, he was about to resume his walk when he noticed that the Frenchman had been joined by a companion, who appeared to have been making similar inquiries. The latter started and uttered a slight exclamation on meeting Pringle's eye. The recognition was mutual—it was the French attaché! As he hurried down Bond Street, Pringle realised with acutest annoyance that his deception at the restaurant had been unavailing, while he must now abandon all hope of a counter-plot for the honour of his country, to say nothing of his own profit. The port-wine mark on his right cheek was far too conspicuous for the attaché not to recognise him by it, and he regretted his neglect to remove it as soon as he had decided to follow up the affair. Forgetful of all beside, he walked on into Piccadilly, and it was not until he found himself more than half-way back to his chambers that he remembered the purpose for which he had set out; but matters of greater moment now claimed his attention, and he endeavoured by the brisk exercise to work off some

of the chagrin with which he was consumed. Only as he reached the Inn and turned into the gateway did it occur to him that he had been culpably careless in thus going straight homeward. What if he had been followed? Never in his life had he shown such disregard of ordinary precautions. Glancing back, he just caught a glimpse of a figure which seemed to whip behind the corner of the gateway. He retraced his steps and looked out into Holborn. There, in the very act of retreat, and still but a few feet from the gate, was the attaché himself. Cursing the persistence of his own folly, Pringle dived through the arch again, and determined that the Frenchman should discover no more that day he turned nimbly to the left and ran up his own stairway before the pursuer could have time to re-enter the Inn.

The most galling reflection was his absolute impotence in the matter. Through lack of the most elementary foresight he had been fairly run to earth, and could see no way of ridding himself of this unwelcome attention. To transfer his domicile, to tear himself up by the roots as it were, was out of the question; and as he glanced around him, from the soft carpets and luxurious chairs to the warm, distempered walls with their old prints above the dado of dwarf bookcases, he felt that the pang of severance from the refined associations of his chambers would be too acute. Besides, he would inevitably be tracked elsewhere. He would gain nothing by the transfer. One thing at least was absolutely certain—the trouble which the Frenchman was taking to watch him showed the importance he attached to Pringle's discovery. But this again only increased his disgust with the ill-luck which had met him at the very outset. After all, he had done nothing illegal, however contrary it might be to the code of ethics, so that if it pleased them the entire French legation might continue to watch him till the Day of Judgment, and, consoling

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himself with this reflection, he philosophically dismissed the matter from his mind.

It was nearing six when he again left the Inn for Pagani's, the Great Portland Street restaurant which he much affected; instead of proceeding due west, he crossed Holborn intending to bear round by way of the Strand and Regent Street, and so get up an appetite. In Staple Inn he paused a moment in the further archway. The little square, always reposeful amid the stress and turmoil of its environment, seemed doubly so this evening, its eighteenth-century calm so welcome after the raucous thoroughfare. An approaching footfall echoed noisily, and as Pringle moved from the shadow of the narrow wall the newcomer hesitated and stopped, and then made the circuit of the square, scanning the doorways as if in search of a name. The action was not unnatural, and twenty-four hours earlier Pringle would have thought nothing of it, but after the events of the morning he endowed it with a personal interest, and, walking on, he ascended the steps into Southampton Buildings and stopped by a hoarding. As he looked back he was rewarded by the sight of a man stealthily emerging from the archway and making his way up the steps, only to halt as he suddenly came abreast of Pringle. Although his face was unfamiliar, Pringle could only conclude that the man was following him, and all doubt was removed when, having walked along the street and turning about at the entrance to Chancery Lane, he saw the spy had resumed the chase and was now but a few yards back. Pringle, as a philosopher, felt more inclined to laughter than resentment at this ludicrous espionage. In a spirit of mischief, he pursued his way to the Strand at a tortoise-like crawl, halting as if doubtful of his way at every corner, and staring into every shop whose lights still invited customers. Once or twice he even doubled back, and passing quite close to the man, had several opportunities of examining him. He was

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quite unobtrusive, even respectable-looking; there was nothing of the foreigner about him, and Pringle shrewdly conjectured that the attaché, wearied of sentry-go had turned it over to some English servant on whom he could rely.

Thus shepherded, Pringle arrived at the restaurant, from which he only emerged after a stay maliciously prolonged over each item of the menu, followed by the smoking of no fewer than three cigars of a brand specially lauded by the proprietor. With a measure of humanity diluting his malice, he was about to offer the infallibly exhausted sentinel some refreshment when he came out, but as the man was invisible, Pringle started for home, taking much the same route as before, and calmly debating whether or no the cigars he had just sampled would be a wise investment; nor until he had reached Southampton Buildings and the sight of the hoarding recalled the spy's discomfiture, did he think of looking back to see if he were still followed. All but the main thoroughfares were by this time deserted, and although he shot a keen glance up and down Chancery Lane, now clear of all but the most casual traffic, not a soul was anywhere near him. By a curious psychological process Pringle felt inclined to resent the man's absence. He had begun to regard him almost in the light of a body-guard, the private escort of some eminent politician. Besides, the whole incident was pregnant with possibilities appealing to his keenly intellectual sense of humour, and as he passed the hoarding, he peered into its shadow with the half-admitted hope that his attendant might be lurking in the depths. Later on he recalled how, as he glanced upwards, a man's figure passed like a shadow from a ladder to an upper platform of the scaffold. The vision, fleeting and unsubstantial, had gone almost before his retina had received it, but the momentary halt was to prove his salvation. Even as he turned to walk on, a cataract

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of planks, amid scaffold-poles and a chaos of loose bricks, crashed on the spot he was about to traverse; a stray beam, more erratic in its descent, caught his hat, and, telescoping it, glanced off his shoulder, bearing him to the ground, where he lay dazed by the sudden uproar and half-choked by the cloud of dust. Rapid and disconcerting as was the event, he remembered afterwards a dim and spectral shape approaching through the gloom. In a dreamy kind of way he connected it with that other shadow-figure he had seen high up on the scaffold, and as it bent over him he recognized the now familiar features of the spy. But other figures replaced the first, and, when helped to his feet, he made futile search for it amid the circle of faces gathered round him. He judged it an hallucination. By the time he had undergone a tentative dust-down, he was sufficiently collected to acknowledge the sympathetic congratulations of the crowd and to decline the homeward escort of a constable.

In the privacy of his chambers, his ideas began to clarify. Events arranged themselves in logical sequence, and the spectres assumed more tangible form. A single question dwarfed all others. He asked himself, 'Was the cataclysm such an accident as it appeared?' And as he surveyed the battered ruins of his hat, he began to realise how nearly had he been the victim of a murderous vendetta!

When he arose the next morning, he scarcely needed the dilapidated hat to remind him of the events of yesterday. Normally a sound and dreamless sleeper, his rest had been a series of short snatches of slumber interposed between longer spells of rumination. While he marvelled at the intensity of malice which he could no longer doubt pursued him—a vindictiveness more natural to a mediaeval Italian state than to this present-day metropolis—he bitterly regretted the fatal curiosity which had brought him to such an extremity. By no means deficient in the grosser

forms of physical courage, his sense that in the game which was being played his adversaries, as unscrupulous as they were crafty, held all the cards, and above all, that their espionage effectually prevented him filling the gaps in the plot which he had as yet only half-discovered, was especially galling to his active and somewhat neurotic temperament. Until yesterday he had almost decided to drop the affair of the Restaurant 'Poissonière' but now, after what he firmly believed to be a deliberate attempt to assassinate him, he realized the desperate situation of a duellist with his back to a wall—having scarce room to parry, he felt the prick of his antagonist's rapier deliberately goading him to an incautious thrust. Was he regarded as the possessor of a dangerous secret? Then it behoved him to strike, and that without delay.

Now that he was about to attack, a disguise was essential; and reflecting how lamentably he had failed through the absence of one hitherto, he removed the port-wine mark from his right cheek with his customary spirit-lotion, and blackened his fair hair with a few smart applications of a preparation from his bureau. It was with a determination to shun any obscure streets or alleys, and especially all buildings in course of erection, that he started out after his usual light breakfast. At first he was doubtful whether he was being followed or not, but after a few experimental turns and doublings he was unable to single out any regular attendant of his walk; either his disguise had proved effectual, or his enemies imagined that the attempt of last night had been less innocent in its results.

Somewhat soothed by this discovery, Pringle had gravitated towards the Strand and was nearing Charing Cross, when he observed a man cross from the station to the opposite corner carrying a brown paper roll. With his thoughts running in the one direction, Pringle in a flash recognised the dockyard draughtsman. Could he be even

now on his way to keep the appointment at Nelson's Column? Had he been warned of Pringle's discovery, and so expedited his treacherous task? And thus reflecting, Pringle determined at all hazards to follow him. The draughtsman made straight for the telegraph office. It was now the busiest time of the morning, most of the little desks were occupied by more or less glib message-writers, and the draughtsman had found a single vacancy at the far end when Pringle followed him in and reached over his shoulder to withdraw a form from the rack in front of him. Grabbing three or four, Pringle neatly spilled them upon the desk, and with an abject apology hastily gathered them up together with the form the draughtsman was employed upon. More apologies; and Pringle, seizing a suddenly vacant desk, affected to compose a telegram of his own. The draughtsman's message had been short, and (to Pringle) exceptionally sweet, consisting as it did of the three words—'Four-thirty, Pauline'. The address Pringle had not attempted to read—he knew that already. The moment the other left Pringle took up a sheaf of forms, and, as if they had been the sole reason of his visit, hurried out of the office and took a hansom back to Furnival's Inn.

Here his first care was to fold some newspapers into a brown-paper parcel resembling the one carried by the draughtsman as nearly as he remembered it, and having cut a number of squares of stiff tissue paper, he stuffed an envelope with them and pondered over a cigarette the most difficult stage of his campaign. Twice had the draughtsman seen him. Once at the restaurant, in his official guise as the sham literary agent, with smooth face, fair hair, and the fugitive port-wine mark staining his right cheek; again that morning, with blackened hair and unblemished face. True, he might have forgotten the stranger at the restaurant; on the other hand, he might not—and Pringle was then (as always) steadfastly averse to leaving anything to chance.

Besides, in view of this sudden journey to London, it was very likely that he had received warning of Pringle's discovery. Lastly, it was more than probable that the spy was still on duty, even though he had failed to recognise Pringle that morning. The matter was clinched by a single glance at the Venetian mirror above the mantel, which reflected a feature he had overlooked—his now blackened hair. Nothing remained for him but to assume a disguise which should impose on both the spy and the draughtsman, and after some thought he decided to make up as a Frenchman of the South, and to pose as a servant of the French embassy. Reminiscent of the immortal Tartarin, his ready bureau furnished him with a stiff black moustache and some specially stout horsehair to typify the stubbly beard of that hero. When, at almost a quarter to four, he descended into the Inn with the parcel in his hand, a Baedeker and the envelope of tissues in his pocket, a cab was just setting down, and impulsively he chartered it as far as Exeter Hall. Concealed in the cab, he imagined he would the more readily escape observation, and by the time he alighted, flattered himself that any pursuit had been baffled. As he discharged the cab, however, he noticed a hansom draw up a few paces in the rear, whilst a man got out and began to saunter westward behind him. His suspicions alert, although the man was certainly a stranger, Pringle at once put him to the test by entering Romano's and ordering a small whisky. After a decent delay, he emerged, and his pulse quickened when he saw a couple of doors off the same man staring into a shop window! Pringle walked a few yards back, and then crossed to the opposite side of the street, but although he dodged at infinite peril through a string of omnibuses, he was unable to shake off his satellite, who, with unswerving persistence, occupied the most limited horizon whenever he looked back.

For almost the first time in his life, Pringle began to

despair. The complacent regard of his own precautions had proved but a fool's paradise. Despite his elaborate disguise, he must have been plainly recognisable to his enemies, and he began to ask himself whether it was not useless to struggle further. As he paced slowly on, an indefinable depression stole over him. He thought of the heavy price so nearly exacted for his interposition. Resentment surged over him at the memory, and his hand clenched in the parcel. The contact furnished the very stimulus he required. The instrument of settling such a score was in his hands, and rejecting his timorous doubts, he strode on, determined to make one bold and final stroke for vengeance. The shadows had lengthened appreciably, and the quarter chiming from near St Martin's warned him that there was no time to lose—the spy must be got rid of at any cost. Already could he see the estuary of the Strand, with the square widening beyond; on his right loomed the tunnel of the Lowther Arcade, with its vista of juvenile delights. The sight was an inspiration. Darting in, he turned off sharp to the left into an artist's repository, with a double entrance to the Strand and the Arcade, and, softly closing the door, peeped through the palettes and frames which hung upon the glass. Hardly had they ceased swinging to his movement when he had the satisfaction of seeing the spy, the scent already cold, rush furiously up the Arcade, his course marked by falling toys and the cries of the outraged stall-keepers. Turning, Pringle made the purchase of a sketching-block, the first thing handy, and then passed through the door which gave on the Strand. At the post-office he stopped to survey the scene. A single policeman stood by the eastward base of the column, and the people scattered round seemed but ordinary wayfarers, but just across the maze of traffic was a spectacle of intense interest to him. At the quadrant of the Grand Hotel, patrolling aimlessly in front of the shops, at which he seemed too

perturbed to stare for more than a few seconds at a time, the draughtsman kept palpitating vigil until the clock should strike the half-hour of his treason. True to the Frenchman's advice, he sought safety in a crowd, avoiding the desert of the square until the last moment.

It wanted two minutes to the half-hour when Pringle opened his Baedeker, and thrusting one hand into his breast, examined the statue and coil of rope erected to the glory of our greatest hero. 'Pauline!' said a voice, with the musical inflection unattainable by any but a Frenchman. Beside him stood a slight, neatly dressed young man, with close-cropped hair, and a moustache and imperial, who cast a significant look at the parcel. Pringle immediately held it towards him, and the dark gentleman producing an envelope from his breast-pocket, the exchange was effected in silence. With bows and a raising of hats they parted, while Big Ben boomed on his eight bells.

The attaché's representative had disappeared some minutes beyond the westernmost lion before the draughtsman appeared from the opposite direction, his uncertain steps intermitted by frequent halts and nervous backward glances. With his back to the National Gallery he produced a Baedeker and commenced to stare up at the monument, withdrawing his eyes every now and then to cast a shame-faced look to right and left. In his agitation the draughtsman had omitted the hand-in-the-breast attitude, and even as Pringle advanced to his side and murmured 'Pauline', his legs (almost stronger than his will) seemed to be urging him to a flight from the field of dishonour. With tremulous eagerness he thrust a brown paper parcel into Pringle's hands, and, snatching the envelope of tissue slips, rushed across the road and disappeared in the bar of the Grand Hotel.

Pringle turned to go, but was confronted by a revolver, and as his eye traversed the barrel and met that of its owner,

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he recognised the Frenchman to whom he had just sold the bundle of newspapers. Dodging the weapon, he tried to spring into the open, but a restraining grip on each elbow held him in the angle of the plinth, and turning ever so little Pringle found himself in custody of the man whom he had last seen in full cry up the Lowther Arcade. No constable was anywhere near, and even casual passengers walked unheeding by the nook, so quiet was the progress of this little drama. Lowering his revolver, the dark gentleman picked up the parcel which had fallen from Pringle in the struggle. He opened it with delicacy, partially withdrew some sheets of tracing paper, which he intently examined, and then placed the whole in an inner pocket, and giving a sign to the spy to loose his grasp, he spoke for the first time.

‘May I suggest, sir,’ he said in excellent English with the slightest foreign accent, ‘may I suggest that in future you do not meddle with what cannot possibly concern you? These documents have been bought and sold, and although you have been good enough to act as intermediary in the transaction, I can assure you we were under no necessity of calling on you for your help.’ Here his tone hardened, and, speaking with less calmness, the accent became more noticeable. ‘I discovered your impertinence in selling me a parcel of worthless papers very shortly after I left you. Had you succeeded in the attempt you appear to have planned so carefully, it is possible you might have lived long enough to regret it—perhaps not! I wish you good day, sir.’ He bowed, as did his companion, and Pringle, walking on, turned up by the corner of the Union Club.

Dent’s clock marked twenty minutes to five, and Pringle reflected how much had been compressed into the last quarter of an hour. True, he had not prevented the sale of his country’s secrets; on the other hand—he pressed the packet which held the envelope of notes. Hailing a cab,

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he was about to step in, when, looking back, at the nook between the lions he saw a confused movement about the spot. The two men he had just left were struggling with a third, who, brandishing a handful of something white, was endeavouring, with varying success, to plant his fist on divers areas of their persons. He was the draughtsman. A small crowd, which momentarily increased, surrounded them, and as Pringle climbed into the hansom two policemen were seen to penetrate the ring and impartially lay hands upon the three combatants.

The Secret of the Fox Hunter

'A telegram to my rooms will bring me to your lordship at any moment,' was my answer.

'Ready to go anywhere—eh, Drew?' he smiled; and then, after a further chat, I left Downing Street and returned to Bloomsbury.

Knowing that for at least a week or two I should be free, I left my address with Boyd, and went down to Cotterstock, in Northamptonshire, to stay with my old friend of college days, George Hamilton, who rented a hunting-box and rode with the Fitzwilliam Pack.

I had had a long-standing engagement with him to go down and get a few runs with the hounds, but my constant absence abroad had always prevented it until then. Of course none of my friends knew my real position at the Foreign Office. I was believed to be an attaché.

Personally, I am extremely fond of riding to hounds, therefore, when that night I sat at dinner with George, his wife, and the latter's cousin, Beatrice Graham, I was full of expectation of some good runs. An English country house, with its old oak, old silver and air of solidity, is always delightful to me after the flimsy gimcracks of Continental life. The evening proved a very pleasant one. Never having met Beatrice Graham before, I was much attracted by her striking beauty. She was tall and dark, about twenty-two, with a remarkable figure which was shown to advantage by her dinner-gown of turquoise blue. So well did she talk, so splendidly did she sing Dupont's 'Jeune Fille', and so enthusiastic was she regarding hunting, that, before I had been an hour with her, I found myself thoroughly entranced.

The meet, three days afterwards, was at Wansford, that old-time hunting centre by the Nene, about six miles distant, and as I rode at her side along the road through historic Fotheringhay and Nassington, I noticed what a splendid horsewoman she was. Her dark hair was coiled

tightly behind, and her bowler hat suited her face admirably while her habit fitted as though it had been moulded to her figure. In her mare's tail was a tiny piece of scarlet silk to warn others that she was a kicker.

At Wansford, opposite the old Haycock, once a hunting inn in the old coaching days, but now Lord Chesham's hunting-box, the gathering was a large one. From the great rambling old house servants carried glasses of sloe gin to all who cared to partake of his lordship's hospitality, while every moment the meet grew larger and the crowd of horses and vehicles more congested.

George had crossed to chat with the Master, Mr George Fitzwilliam, who had just driven up and was still in his overcoat, therefore I found myself alone with my handsome companion, who appeared to be most popular everywhere. Dozens of men and women rode up to her and exchanged greetings, the men more especially, until at last Barnard, the huntsman, drew his hounds together, the word was given, and they went leisurely up the hill to draw the first cover.

The morning was one of those damp cold ones of mid-February; the frost had given and everyone expected a good run, for the scent would be excellent. Riding side by side with my fair companion, we chatted and laughed as we went along, until, on reaching the cover, we drew up with the others and halted while hounds went in.

The first cover was, however, drawn blank, but from the second a fox went away straight for Elton, and soon the hounds were in full cry after him and we followed at a gallop. After a couple of miles more than half the field was left behind, still we kept on, until of a sudden, and without effort, my companion took a high hedge and was cutting across the pastures ere I knew that she had left the road. That she was a straight rider I at once saw, and I must con-

VIII

The Secret of the Fox Hunter

William Le Queux

It happened three winters ago. Having just returned from Stuttgart, where I had spent some weeks at the Marquardt in the guise I so often assumed, that of Monsieur Gustav Dreux, commercial traveller, of Paris, and where I had been engaged in watching the movements of two persons staying in the hotel, a man and a woman, I was glad to be back again in Bloomsbury to enjoy the ease of my arm-chair and pipe.

I was much gratified that I had concluded a very difficult piece of espionage, and having obtained the information I sought, had been able to place certain facts before my Chief, the Marquess of Macclesfield, which had very materially strengthened his hands in some very delicate diplomatic negotiations with Germany. Perhaps the most exacting position in the whole of British diplomacy is the post of Ambassador at Berlin, for the Germans are at once our foes, as well as our friends, and are at this moment only too ready to pick a quarrel with us from motives of jealousy which may have serious results.

The war cloud was still hovering over Europe; hence a swarm of spies, male and female, were plotting, scheming,

and working in secret in our very midst. The reader would be amazed if he could but glance at a certain red-bound book, kept under lock and key at the Foreign Office, in which are registered the names, personal descriptions and other facts concerning all the known foreign spies living in London and in other towns in England.

But active as are the agents of our enemies, so also are we active in the opposition camp. Our Empire has such tremendous responsibilities that we cannot now depend upon mere birth, wealth and honest dealing, but must call in shrewdness, tact, subterfuge and the employment of secret agents in order to combat the plots of those ever seeking to accomplish England's overthrow.

Careful student of international affairs that I was, I knew that trouble was brewing in China. Certain confidential despatches from our Minister in Peking had been shown to me by the Marquess, who, on occasion, flattered me by placing implicit trust in me, and from them I gathered that Russia was at work in secret to undermine our influence in the Far East.

I knew that the grave, kindly old statesman was greatly perturbed by the grim shadows that were slowly rising, but when we consulted on the day after my return from Stuttgart, his lordship was of opinion that at present I had not sufficient ground upon which to institute inquiries.

'For the present, Drew,' he said, 'we must watch and wait. There is war in the air—first at Peking, and then in Europe. But we must prevent it at all costs. Huntley leaves for Peking tonight with despatches in which I have fully explained the line which Sir Henry is to follow. Hold yourself in readiness, for you may have to return to Germany or Russia tomorrow. We cannot afford to remain long in the dark. We must crush any alliance between Petersburg and Berlin.'

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fess that I preferred the gate to the hedge and ditch which she had taken so easily.

Half an hour later the kill took place near Haddon Hall, and of the half dozen in at the death Beatrice Graham was one.

When I rode up, five minutes afterwards, she smiled at me. Her face was a trifle flushed by hard riding, yet her hair was in no way awry, and she declared that she had thoroughly enjoyed that tearing gallop.

Just, however, as we sat watching Barnard cut off the brush, a tall, rather good-looking man rode up, having apparently been left just as I had. As he approached I noticed that he gave my pretty friend a strange look, almost as of warning, while she on her part, refrained from acknowledging him. It was as though he had made her some secret sign which she had understood.

But there was a further fact that puzzled me greatly.

I had recognized in that well-turned-out hunting man someone whom I had had distinct occasion to recollect. At first I failed to recall the man's identity, but when I did, a few moments later, I sat regarding his retreating figure like one in a dream. The horseman who rode with such military bearing was none other than the renowned spy, one of the cleverest secret agents in the world, Otto Krempelstein, Chief of the German Secret Service.

That my charming little friend knew him was apparent. The slightest quiver in his eyelids and the almost imperceptible curl of his lip had not passed me unnoticed. There was some secret between them, of what nature I, of course, knew not. But all through that day my eyes were ever open to re-discover the man whose ingenuity and cunning had so often been in competition with my own. Twice I saw him again, once riding with a big, dark-haired man in pink, on a splendid bay and followed by a groom with a second horse, and on the second occasion, at the edge of

Stockhill Wood while we were waiting together he galloped past us, but without the slightest look of recognition.

'I wonder who that man is?' I remarked casually, as soon as he was out of hearing.

'I don't know,' was her prompt reply. 'He's often out with the hounds—a foreigner, I believe. Probably he's one of those who come to England for the hunting season. Since the late Empress of Austria came here to hunt, the Fitzwilliam has always been a favourite pack with the foreigners.'

I saw that she did not intend to admit that she had any knowledge of him. Like all women, she was a clever diplomatist. But he had made a sign to her—a sign of secrecy.

Did Krempelstein recognize me, I wondered? I could not think so, because we had never met face to face. He had once been pointed out to me in the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin by one of our secret agents who knew him, and his features had ever since been graven on my memory.

That night, when I sat alone with my friend George, I learned from him that Mr Graham, his wife's uncle, had lived a long time on the Continent as manager to a large commercial firm, and that Beatrice had been born in France and had lived there a good many years. I made inquiries regarding the foreigners who were hunting that season with the Fitzwilliam, but he, with an Englishman's prejudice, declared that he knew none of them, and didn't want to know them.

The days passed and we went to several meets together—at Apethorpe, at Castor Hanglands, at Laxton Park and other places, but I saw no more of Krempelstein. His distinguished-looking friend, however, I met on several occasions, and discovered that his name was Baron Stern, a wealthy Viennese, who had taken a hunting-box near Stoke Doyle, and had as friend a young man named Percival, who was frequently out with the hounds.

But the discovery there of Krempelstein had thoroughly

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aroused my curiosity. He had been there for some distinct purpose, without a doubt. Therefore I made inquiry of Kersch, one of our secret agents in Berlin, a man employed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and from him received word that Krempelstein was back in Berlin, and further warning me that something unusual was on foot in England.

This aroused me at once to activity. I knew that Krempelstein and his agents were ever endeavouring to obtain the secrets of our guns, our ships, and our diplomacy with other nations, and I therefore determined that on this occasion he should not succeed. However much I admired Beatrice Graham, I now knew that she had lied to me, and that she was in all probability his associate. So I watched her carefully, and when she went out for a stroll or a ride, as she often did, I followed her.

How far I was justified in this action does not concern me. I had quite unexpectedly alighted upon certain suspicious facts, and was determined to elucidate them. The only stranger she met was Percival. Late one afternoon, just as dusk was deepening into night, she pulled up her mare beneath the bare black trees while crossing Burghley Park, and after a few minutes was joined by the young foreigner, who, having greeted her, chatted for a long time in a low, earnest tone, as though giving her directions. She seemed to remonstrate with him, but at the place I was concealed I was unable to distinguish what was said. I saw him, however, hand her something, and then, raising his hat, he turned his horse and galloped away down the avenue in the opposite direction.

I did not meet her again until I sat beside her at the dinner-table that night, and then I noticed how pale and anxious she was, entirely changed from her usual sweet, light-hearted self.

She told me that she had ridden into Stamford for exercise, but told me nothing of the clandestine meeting.

How I longed to know what the young foreigner had given her. Whatever it was, she kept it a close secret to herself.

More than once I felt impelled to go to her room in her absence and search her cupboards, drawers and travelling trunks. My attitude towards her was that of a man fallen entirely in love, for I had discovered that she was easily flattered by a little attention.

I was searching for some excuse to know Baron Stern, but often for a week he never went to the meets. It was as though he purposely avoided me. He was still at Weldon Lodge, near Stoke Doyle, for George told me that he had met him in Oundle only two days before.

Three whole weeks went by, and I remained just as puzzled as ever. Beatrice Graham was, after all, a most delightful companion, and although she was to me a mystery, yet we had become excellent friends.

One afternoon, just as I entered the drawing-room where she stood alone, she hurriedly tore up a note, and threw the pieces on the great log fire. I noticed one tiny piece about an inch square remained unconsumed, and managed, half an hour later, to get possession of it.

The writing upon it was, I found, in German, four words in all, which, without context, conveyed to me no meaning.

On the following night Mrs Hamilton and Beatrice remained with us in the smoking-room till nearly eleven o'clock, and at midnight I bade my host good night, and ascended the stairs to retire. I had been in my room about half an hour when I heard stealthy footsteps. In an instant the truth flashed upon me. It was Beatrice on her way downstairs.

Quickly I slipped on some things and noiselessly followed my pretty fellow-guest through the drawing-room out across the lawn and into the lane beyond. White mists had risen from the river, and the low roaring of the weir prevented her hearing my footsteps behind her. Fearing lest

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I should lose her I kept close behind, following her across several grass fields until she came to Southwick Wood, a dark, deserted spot, away from road or habitation.

Her intention was evidently to meet someone, so when, presently, she halted beneath a clump of high black firs, I also took shelter a short distance away.

She sat on the fallen trunk of a tree and waited in patience. Time went on, and so cold was it that I became chilled to the bones. I longed for a pipe, but feared that the smell of tobacco or the light might attract her. Therefore I was compelled to crouch and await the clandestine meeting.

She remained very quiet. Not a dead leaf was stirred; not a sound came from her direction. I wondered why she waited in such complete silence.

Nearly two hours passed, when, at last, cramped and half frozen, I raised myself in order to peer into the darkness in her direction.

At first I could see no one, but, on straining my eyes, I saw, to my dismay, that she had fallen forward from the tree trunk, and was lying motionless in a heap upon the ground.

I called to her, but received no reply. Then rising, I walked to the spot, and in dismay threw myself on my knees and tried to raise her. My hand touched her white cheek. It was as cold as stone.

Next instant I undid her fur cape and bodice, and placed my hand upon her heart. There was no movement.

Beatrice Graham was dead.

The shock of the discovery held me spellbound. But when, a few moments later, I aroused myself to action, a difficult problem presented itself. Should I creep back to my room and say nothing, or should I raise the alarm, and admit that I had been watching her? My first care was to

search the unfortunate girl's pocket, but I found nothing save a handkerchief and purse.

Then I walked back, and, regardless of the consequences, gave the alarm.

It is unnecessary here to describe the sensation caused by the discovery, or of how we carried the body back to the house. Suffice it to say that we called the doctor, who could find no mark of violence, or anything to account for death.

And yet she had expired suddenly, without a cry.

One feature, however, puzzled the doctor—namely, that her left hand and arm were much swollen, and had turned almost black, while the spine was curved—a fact which aroused a suspicion of some poison akin to strychnia.

From the very first, I held a theory that she had been secretly poisoned, but with what motive I could not imagine.

A post-mortem examination was made by three doctors on the following day, but, beyond confirming the theory I held, they discovered nothing.

On the day following, a few hours before the inquest, I was recalled to the Foreign Office by telegraph, and that same afternoon sat with the Marquess of Macclesfield in his private room receiving his instructions.

An urgent despatch from Lord Rockingham, our Ambassador at Petersburg, made it plain that an alliance had been proposed by Russia to Germany, the effect of which would be to break British power in the Far East. His Excellency knew that the terms of the secret agreement had been settled, and all that remained was its signature. Indeed, it would have already been signed save for opposition in some quarters unknown, and while that opposition existed I might gain time to ascertain the exact terms of the proposed alliance—no light task in Russia, be it said, for police spies exist there in thousands, and my disguise

had always to be very carefully thought out whenever I passed the frontier at Wirballen.

The Marquess urged upon me to put all our secret machinery in motion in order to discover the terms of the proposed agreement, and more particularly as regards the extension of Russian influence in Manchuria.

‘I know well the enormous difficulties of the inquiry,’ his lordship said; ‘but recollect, Drew, that in this matter you may be the means of saving the situation in the Far East. If we gain knowledge of the truth, we may be able to act promptly and effectively. If not—well—’ and the grey-headed statesman shrugged his shoulders expressively without concluding the sentence.

Full of regret that I was unable to remain at Cotterstock and sift the mystery surrounding Beatrice Graham’s death, I left London that night for Berlin, where, on the following evening, I called upon our secret agent, Kersch, who lived in a small but comfortable house at Teltow, one of the suburbs of the German capital. He occupied a responsible position in the German Foreign Office, but, having expensive tastes and a penchant for cards, was not averse to receiving British gold in exchange for the confidential information with which he furnished us from time to time.

I sat with him, discussing the situation for a long time. It was true, he said, that a draft agreement had been prepared and placed before the Tzar and the Kaiser, but it had not yet been signed. He knew nothing of the clauses, however, as they had been prepared in secret by the Minister’s own hand, neither could he suggest any means of obtaining knowledge of them.

My impulse was to go on next day to Petersburg. Yet somehow I felt that I might be more successful in Germany than in Russia, so resolved to continue my inquiries.

‘By the way,’ the German said, ‘you wrote me about Krempelstein. He has been absent a great deal lately, but

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I had no idea he had been to England. Can he be interested in the same matter on which you are now engaged?’

‘Is he now in Berlin?’ I inquired eagerly.

‘I met him at Boxhagen three days ago. He seems extremely active just now.’

‘Three days ago!’ I echoed. ‘You are quite certain of the day?’ I asked him this because, if his statement were true, it was proved beyond doubt that the German spy had no hand in the unfortunate girl’s death.

‘I am quite certain,’ was his reply. ‘I saw him entering the station on Monday morning.’

At eleven o’clock that same night, I called at the British Embassy and sat for a long time with the Ambassador in his private room. His Excellency told me all he knew regarding the international complication which the Marquess, sitting in Downing Street, had foreseen weeks ago, but could make no suggestion as to my course of action. The war clouds had gathered undoubtedly, and the signing of the agreement between our enemies would cause it at once to burst over Europe. The crisis was one of the most serious in English history.

One fact puzzled us both, just as it puzzled our Chief at home—namely, if the agreement had been seen and approved by both Emperors, why was it not signed? Whatever hitch had occurred, it was more potent than the will of the two most powerful monarchs in Europe.

On my return to the hotel I scribbled a hasty note and sent it by messenger to the house of the Imperial Chancellor’s son in Charlottenburg. It was addressed to Miss Maud Baines, the English governess of the Count’s children, who, I may as well admit, was in our employ. She was a young, ingenuous and fascinating little woman. She had, at my direction, acted as governess in many of the great families in France, Russia and Germany, and was now in the employ of the Chancellor’s son, in order to have opportunity

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of keeping a watchful eye on the great statesman himself.

She kept the appointment next morning at an obscure café near the Behrenstrasse. She was a neatly dressed, rather petite person, with a face that entirely concealed her keen intelligence and marvellous cunning.

As she sat at the little table with me, I told her in low tones of the object of my visit to Berlin, and sought her aid.

‘A serious complication has arisen. I was about to report to you through the Embassy,’ was her answer. ‘Last night the Chancellor dined with us, and I overheard him discussing the affair with his son as they sat alone smoking after the ladies had left. I listened at the door and heard the Chancellor distinctly say that the draft treaty had been stolen.’

‘Stolen!’ I gasped. ‘By whom?’

‘Ah! that’s evidently the mystery—a mystery for us to fathom. But the fact that somebody else is in possession of the intentions of Germany and Russia against England, believed to be a secret, is no doubt the reason why the agreement has not been signed.’

‘Because it is no longer secret!’ I suggested. ‘Are you quite certain you’ve made no mistake?’

‘Quite,’ was her prompt answer. ‘You can surely trust me after the intricate little affairs which I have assisted you in unravelling? When may I return to Gloucester to see my friends?’

‘Soon, Miss Baines—as soon as this affair is cleared up. But tell me, does the Chancellor betray any fear of awkward complications when the secret of the proposed plot against England is exposed?’

‘Yes. The Prince told his son in confidence that his only fear was of England’s retaliation. He explained that, as far as was known, the secret document, after being put before the Tzar and approved, mysteriously disappeared.’

Every inquiry was being made by the confidential agents of Russia and Germany, and further, he added, that even his trusted Krempelstein was utterly nonplussed.'

Mention of Krempelstein brought back to me the recollection of the tragedy in rural England.

'You've done us a great service, Miss Baines,' I said. 'This information is of highest importance. I shall telegraph in cipher at once to Lord Macclesfield. Do you, by any chance, happen to know a young lady named Graham?' I inquired, recollecting that the deceased woman had lived in Germany for several years.

She responded in the negative, whereupon I drew from my pocket a snap-shot photograph, which I had taken of one of the meets of hounds at Wansford, and handing it to her inquired if she recognized any of the persons in it.

Having carefully examined it, she pointed to Baron Stern, whom I had taken in the act of lighting a cigarette, and exclaimed—

'Why! that's Colonel Davidoff, who was secretary to Prince Obolenski when I was in his service. Do you know him?'

'No,' I answered. 'But he has been hunting in England as Baron Stern, of Vienna. This man is his friend,' I added, indicating Percival.

'And that's undoubtedly a man whom you know well by repute—Moore, Chief of the Russian Secret Service in England. He came to Prince Obolenski's once, when he was in Petersburg, and the Princess told me who he was.'

Unfortunately, I had not been able to include Beatrice in the group, therefore I had only her description to place before the clever young woman, who had, on so many occasions, gained knowledge of secrets where I and my agents had failed. Her part was always a difficult one to play, but she was well paid, was a marvellous linguist, and for patience and cunning was unequalled.

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I described her as minutely as I could, but still she had no knowledge of her. She remained thoughtful a long time, and then observed:

‘You have said that she apparently knew Moore? He has, I know, recently been back in Petersburg, therefore they may have met there. She may be known. Why not seek for traces of her in Russia?’

It seemed something of a wild-goose chase, yet with the whole affair shrouded in mystery and tragedy as it was, I was glad to adopt any suggestion that might lead to a solution of the enigma. The reticence of Mrs Hamilton regarding her cousin, and the apparent secret association of the dead girl with those two notorious spies, had formed a problem which puzzled me almost to the point of madness.

The English governess told me where in Petersburg I should be likely to find either the two Russian agents, Davidoff or Moore, who had been posing in England for some unknown purpose as hunting men of means; therefore I left by the night mail for the Russian capital. I put up at a small, and not overclean hotel, in preference to the Europe, and, compelled to carefully conceal my identity, I at once set about making inquiries in various quarters, whether the two men had returned to Russia. They had, and had both had long interviews, two days before, with General Zouboff, Chief of the Secret Service, and with the Russian Foreign Minister.

At the Embassy, and in various English quarters, I sought trace of the woman whose death was such a profound mystery, but all in vain. At last I suddenly thought of another source of information as yet untried—namely, the register of the English Charity in Petersburg, and on searching it, I found, to my complete satisfaction, that about six weeks before Beatrice Graham applied to the administration, and was granted money to take her back to England. She was the daughter, it was registered, of a

Mr Charles Graham, the English manager of a cotton mill in Moscow, who had been killed by an accident, and had left her penniless. For some months she had tried to earn her own living, in a costumier's shop in the Newski, and, not knowing Russian sufficiently well, had been discharged. Before her father's death she had been engaged to marry a young Englishman, whose name was not given, but who was said to be tutor to the children of General Vraski, Governor-General of Warsaw.

The information was interesting, but carried me no further, therefore I set myself to watch the two men who had travelled from England to consult the Tzar's chief adviser. Aided by two Russians, who were in British pay, I shadowed them day and night for six days, until, one evening, I followed Davidoff down to the railway station, where he took a ticket for the frontier. Without baggage I followed him, for his movements were of a man who was escaping from the country. He passed out across the frontier, and went on to Vienna, and thence direct to Paris, where he put up at the Hotel Terminus, Gare St Lazare.

Until our arrival at the hotel he had never detected that I was following him, but on the second day in Paris we came face to face in the large central hall, used as a reading room. He glanced at me quickly, but whether he recognized me as the companion of Beatrice Graham in the hunting field I have no idea. All I know is that his movements were extremely suspicious, and that I invoked the aid of all three of our Secret Agents in Paris to keep watch on him, just as had been done in Petersburg.

On the fourth night of our arrival in the French capital I returned to the hotel about midnight, having dined at the Café Americain with Greville, the naval attaché at the Embassy. In washing my hands prior to turning in, I received a nasty scratch on my left wrist from a pin which a careless laundress had left in the towel. There was a little

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blood, but I tied my handkerchief around it, and, tired out, lay down and was soon asleep.

Half an hour afterwards, however, I was aroused by an excruciating pain over my whole left side, a strange twitching of the muscles of my face and hands, and a contraction of the throat which prevented me from breathing or crying out.

I tried to rise and press the electric bell for assistance, but could not. My whole body seemed entirely paralysed. Then the ghastly truth flashed upon me, causing me to break out into a cold sweat.

That pin had been placed there purposely. I had been poisoned and in the same manner as Beatrice Graham!

I recollect that my heart seemed to stop, and my nails clenched themselves in the palms in agony. Then next moment I knew no more.

When I recovered consciousness, Ted Greville, together with a tall, black-bearded man named Delisle, who was in the confidential department of the Quai d'Orsay and who often furnished us with information—at a very high figure, be it said—were standing by my bedside, while a French doctor was leaning over the foot rail watching me.

'Thank heaven you're better, old chap!' Greville exclaimed. 'They thought you were dead. You've had a narrow squeak. How did it happen?'

'That pin!' I cried, pointing to the towel.

'What pin?' he asked.

'Mind! don't touch the towel,' I cried. 'There's a pin in it—a pin that's poisoned! That Russian evidently came here in my absence and very cunningly laid a deathtrap for me.'

'You mean Davidoff,' chimed in the Frenchman. 'When, m'sieur, the doctor has left the room I can tell you something in confidence.'

The doctor discreetly withdrew, and then our spy said:

‘Davidoff has turned traitor to his own country. I have discovered that the reason of his visit here is because he has in his possession the original draft of a proposed secret agreement between Russia and Germany against England, and is negotiating for its sale to us for one hundred thousand francs. He had a secret interview with our Chief last night at his private house in the Avenue des Champs Elysées.’

‘Then it is he who stole it, after it had the Tzar’s approval!’ I cried, starting up in bed, aroused at once to action by the information. ‘Has he disposed of it to France?’

‘Not yet. It is still in his possession.’

‘And he is here?’

‘No. He has hidden himself in lodgings in the Rue Lafayette, No. 247, until the Foreign Minister decides whether he shall buy the document.’

‘And the name by which he is known there?’

‘He is passing as a Greek named Geunadios.’

‘Keep a strict watch on him. He must not escape,’ I said. ‘He has endeavoured to murder me.’

‘A watch is being kept,’ was the Frenchman’s answer, as, exhausted, I sank again upon the pillow.

Just before midnight I entered the traitor’s room in the Rue Lafayette, and when he saw me he fell back with blanched face and trembling hands.

‘No doubt my presence here surprises you,’ I said, ‘but I may as well at once state my reason for coming here. I want a certain document which concerns Germany and your own country—the document which you have stolen to sell to France.’

‘What do you mean, m’sieur?’ he asked, with an attempted hauteur.

‘My meaning is simple. I require that document, otherwise I shall give you into the hands of the police for attempted murder. The Paris police will detain you until

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the police of Petersburg apply for your extradition as a traitor. You know what that means—Schusselburg.'

Mention of that terrible island fortress, dreaded by every Russian, caused him to quiver. He looked me straight in the face, and saw determination written there, yet he was unyielding, and refused for a long time to give the precious document into my hands. I referred to his stay at Stoke Doyle, and spoke of his friendship with the spy Moore, so that he should know that I was aware of the truth, until at last he suggested a bargain with me, namely, that in exchange for the draft agreement against England I should preserve silence and permit him to return to Russia.

To this course I acceded, and then the fellow took from a secret cavity of his travelling bag a long official envelope, which contained the innocent-looking paper, which would, if signed, have destroyed England's prestige in the Far East. He handed it to me, the document for which he hoped to obtain one hundred thousand francs, and in return I gave him his liberty to go back to Russia unmolested.

Our parting was the reverse of cordial, for undoubtedly he had placed in my towel the pin which had been steeped in some subtle and deadly poison, and then escaped from the hotel, in the knowledge that I must sooner or later become scratched and fall a victim.

I had had a very narrow escape it was true, but I did not think so much of my good fortune in regaining my life as the rapid delivery of the all-important document into Lord Macclesfield's hands, which I effected at noon next day.

My life had been at stake, for I afterwards found that a second man had been his accomplice, but happily I had succeeded in obtaining possession of the actual document, the result being that England acted so promptly and vigorously that the situation was saved, and the way was,

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as you know, opened for the Anglo-Japanese Treaty which, to the discomfiture of Germany, was effected a few months later.

Nearly two years have gone by since then, and it was only the other day, by mere accident, that I made a further discovery which explained the death of the unfortunate Beatrice Graham.

A young infantry lieutenant, named Bellingham, having passed in Russian, had some four years before entered our Secret Service, and been employed in Russia on certain missions. A few days ago, on his return to London, after performing a perilous piece of espionage on the Russo-German frontier, he called upon me in Bloomsbury, and in course of conversation, mentioned that about two years ago, in order to get access to certain documents relating to the Russian mobilisation scheme for her western frontier, he acted as tutor to the sons of the Governor-General of Warsaw.

In an instant a strange conjecture flashed across my mind.

‘Am I correct in assuming that you knew a young English lady in Russia named Graham—Beatrice Graham?’

He looked me straight in the face, open-mouthed in astonishment, yet I saw that a cloud of sadness overshadowed him instantly.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I knew her. Our meeting resulted in a terrible tragedy. Owing to the position I hold I have been compelled to keep the details to myself—although it is the tragedy of my life.’

‘How? Tell me,’ I urged sympathetically.

‘Ah!’ he sighed, ‘it is a strange story. We met in Petersburg, where she was employed in a shop in the Newski. I loved her, and we became engaged. Withholding nothing from her I told her who I was and the reason I was in the service of the Governor-General. At once, instead of

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despising me as a spy, she became enthusiastic as an Englishwoman, and declared her readiness to assist me. She was looking forward to our marriage, and saw that if I could effect a big coup my position would at once be improved, and we could then be united.'

He broke off, and remained silent for a few moments, looking blankly down into the grey London street. Then he said,

'I explained to her the suspicion that Germany and Russia were conspiring in the Far East, and told her that a draft treaty was probably in existence, and that it was a document of supreme importance to British interests. Judge my utter surprise when, a week later, she came to me with the actual document which she said she had managed to secure from the private cabinet of Prince Korolkoff, director of the private Chancellerie of the Emperor, to whose house she had gone on a commission to the Princess. Truly she had acted with a boldness and cleverness that were amazing. Knowing the supreme importance of the document, I urged her to leave Russia at once, and conceal herself with friends in England, taking care always that the draft treaty never left her possession. This plan she adopted, first, however, placing herself under the protection of the English charity, thus allaying any suspicions that the police might entertain.

'Poor Beatrice went to stay with her cousin, a lady named Hamilton, in Northamptonshire, but the instant the document was missed the Secret Services of Germany and Russia were at once agog, and the whole machinery was set in motion, with the result that two Russian agents—an Englishman named Moore, and a Russian named Davidoff—as well as Krempelstein, chief of the German Service, had suspicions, and followed her to England with the purpose of obtaining re-possession of the precious document. For some weeks they plotted in vain, although

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both the German and the Englishman succeeded in getting on friendly terms with her.

'She telegraphed to me, asking how she should dispose of the document, fearing to keep it long in her possession, but not being aware of the desperate character of the game, I replied that there was nothing to be feared. I was wrong,' he cried, bitterly. 'I did not recognize the vital importance of the information; I did not know that Empires were at stake. The man Davidoff, who posed as a wealthy Austrian Baron, had by some means discovered that she always carried the precious draft concealed in the bodice of her dress, therefore he had recourse to a dastardly ruse. From what I have since discovered he one day succeeded in concealing in the fur of her cape a pin impregnated with a certain deadly arrow poison unknown to toxicologists. Then he caused to be dispatched from London a telegram purporting to come from me, urging her to meet me in secret at a certain spot on that same night. In eager expectation the poor girl went forth to meet me, believing I had returned unexpectedly from Russia, but in putting on her cape, she tore her finger with the poisoned pin. While waiting for me the fatal paralysis seized her, and she expired, after which Davidoff crept up, secured the missing document and escaped. His anxiety to get hold of it was to sell it at a high price to a foreign country, nevertheless he was compelled first to return to Russia and report. No one knew that he actually held the draft, for to Krempelstein, as well as to Moore, my poor love's death was believed to be due to natural causes, while Davidoff, on his part, took care to so arrange matters, that his presence at the spot where poor Beatrice expired could never be proved. The spies therefore left England reluctantly after the tragedy, believing that the document, if ever possessed by my unfortunate love, had passed out of her possession into unknown hands.'

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‘And what of the assassin Davidoff now?’ I inquired.

‘I have avenged her death,’ answered Bellingham with set teeth. ‘I gave information to General Zouboff of the traitor’s attempted sale of the draft treaty to France, with the result that the court martial has condemned him to incarceration for life in the cells below the lake at Schusselburg.’

IX

The Mysterious Death on the Underground Railway

The Baroness Orczy

It was all very well for Mr Richard Frobisher (of the London Mail) to cut up rough about it. Polly did not altogether blame him.

She liked him all the better for that frank outburst of manlike ill-temper which, after all said and done, was only a very flattering form of masculine jealousy.

Moreover, Polly distinctly felt guilty about the whole thing. She had promised to meet Dickie—that is Mr Richard Frobisher—at two o'clock sharp outside the Palace Theatre, because she wanted to go to a Maud Allan matinée, and because he naturally wished to go with her.

But at two o'clock sharp she was still in Norfolk Street, Strand, inside an A.B.C. shop, sipping cold coffee opposite a grotesque old man who was fiddling with a bit of string.

How could she be expected to remember Maud Allan or the Palace Theatre, or Dickie himself for a matter of that? The man in the corner had begun to talk of that mysterious death on the Underground Railway, and Polly had lost count of time, of place, and circumstance.

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She had gone to lunch quite early, for she was looking forward to the matinée at the Palace.

The old scarecrow was sitting in his accustomed place when she came into the A.B.C. shop, but he had made no remark all the time that the young girl was munching her scone and butter. She was just busy thinking how rude he was not even to have said 'Good morning', when an abrupt remark from him caused her to look up.

'Will you be good enough,' he said suddenly, 'to give me a description of the man who sat next to you just now, while you were having your cup of coffee and scone.'

Involuntarily Polly turned her head towards the distant door, through which a man in a light overcoat was even now quickly passing. That man had certainly sat at the next table to hers, when she first sat down to her coffee and scone; he had finished his luncheon—whatever it was—a moment ago, had paid at the desk and gone out. The incident did not appear to Polly as being of the slightest consequence.

Therefore she did not reply to the rude old man, but shrugged her shoulders, and called to the waitress to bring her bill.

'Do you know if he was tall or short, dark or fair?' continued the man in the corner, seemingly not the least disconcerted by the young girl's indifference. 'Can you tell me at all what he was like?'

'Of course I can,' rejoined Polly impatiently, 'but I don't see that my description of one of the customers of an A.B.C. shop can have the slightest importance.'

He was silent for a minute, while his nervous fingers fumbled about in his capacious pockets in search of the inevitable piece of string. When he had found this necessary 'adjunct to thought', he viewed the young girl again through his half-closed lids, and added maliciously:

'But supposing it were of paramount importance that

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you should give an accurate description of a man who sat next to you for half an hour today, how would you proceed?

'I should say that he was of medium height——'

'Five foot eight, nine, or ten?' he interrupted quietly.

'How can one tell to an inch or two?' rejoined Poll crossly. 'He was between colours.'

'What's that?' he inquired blandly.

'Neither fair nor dark—his nose—'

'Well, what was his nose like? Will you sketch it?'

'I am not an artist. His nose was fairly straight—his eyes—'

'Were neither dark nor light—his hair had the same striking peculiarity—he was neither short nor tall—his nose was neither aquiline nor snub—' he recapitulated sarcastically.

'No,' she retorted; 'he was just ordinary looking.'

'Would you know him again—say tomorrow, and among a number of other men who were "neither tall nor short, dark nor fair, aquiline nor snub-nosed", etc.?''

'I don't know—I might—he was certainly not striking enough to be specially remembered.'

'Exactly,' he said, while he leant forward excitedly for all the world like a Jack-in-the-box let loose. 'Precisely; and you are a journalist—call yourself one, at least—and it should be part of your business to notice and describe people. I don't mean only the wonderful personage with the clear Saxon features, the fine blue eyes, the noble brow and classic face, but the ordinary person—the person who represents ninety out of every hundred of his own kind—the average Englishman, say, of the middle classes, who is neither very tall nor very short, who wears a moustache which is neither fair nor dark, but which masks his mouth and a top hat which hides the shape of his head and brow, a man, in fact, who dresses like hundreds of his fellow-creatures, moves like them, speaks like them, has no peculiarity

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‘Try to describe *him*, to recognize him, say a week hence, among his other eighty-nine doubles; worse still, to swear his life away, if he happened to be implicated in some crime, wherein *your* recognition of him would place the halter round his neck.

‘Try that, I say, and having utterly failed you will more readily understand how one of the greatest scoundrels unhung is still at large, and why the mystery on the Underground Railway was never cleared up.

‘I think it was the only time in my life that I was seriously tempted to give the police the benefit of my own views upon the matter. You see, though I admire the brute for his cleverness, I did not see that his being unpunished could possibly benefit anyone.

‘In these days of tubes and motor traction of all kinds, the old-fashioned “best, cheapest, and quickest route to City and West End” is often deserted, and the good old Metropolitan Railway carriages cannot at any time be said to be over-crowded. Anyway, when that particular train steamed into Aldgate at about 4 p.m. on March 18th last, the first-class carriages were all but empty.

‘The guard marched up and down the platform looking into all the carriages to see if anyone had left a halfpenny evening paper behind for him, and opening the door of one of the first-class compartments, he noticed a lady sitting in the further corner, with her head turned away towards the window, evidently oblivious of the fact that on this line Aldgate is the terminal station.

“Where are you for, lady?” he said.

‘The lady did not move, and the guard stepped into the carriage, thinking that perhaps the lady was asleep. He touched her arm lightly and looked into her face. In his own poetic language, he was “struck all of a ‘eap”. In the glassy eyes, the ashen colour of the cheeks, the rigidity of the head, there was the unmistakable look of death.

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'Hastily the guard, having carefully locked the carriage door, summoned a couple of porters, and sent one of them off to the police-station, and the other in search of the station-master.

'Fortunately at this time of day the up platform is not very crowded, all the traffic tending westward in the afternoon. It was only when an inspector and two police constables, accompanied by a detective in plain clothes and a medical officer, appeared upon the scene, and stood round a first-class railway compartment, that a few idlers realized that something unusual had occurred, and crowded round, eager and curious.

'Thus it was that the later editions of the evening papers, under the sensational heading, "Mysterious Suicide on the Underground Railway", had already an account of the extraordinary event. The medical officer had very soon come to the decision that the guard had not been mistaken, and that life was indeed extinct.

'The lady was young, and must have been very pretty before the look of fright and horror had so terribly distorted her features. She was very elegantly dressed, and the more frivolous papers were able to give their feminine readers a detailed account of the unfortunate woman's gown, her shoes, hat and gloves.

'It appears that one of the latter, the one on the right hand, was partly off, leaving the thumb and wrist bare. That hand held a small satchel, which the police opened, with a view to the possible identification of the deceased, but which was found to contain only a little loose silver, some smelling-salts, and a small empty bottle, which was handed over to the medical officer for purposes of analysis.

'It was the presence of that small bottle which had caused the report to circulate freely that the mysterious case on the Underground Railway was one of suicide. Certain it was that neither about the lady's person, nor in

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the appearance of the railway carriage, was there the slightest sign of struggle or even of resistance. Only the look in the poor woman's eyes spoke of sudden terror, of the rapid vision of an unexpected and violent death, which probably only lasted an infinitesimal fraction of a second, but which had left its indelible mark upon the face, otherwise so placid and so still.

'The body of the deceased was conveyed to the mortuary. So far, of course, not a soul had been able to identify her, or to throw the slightest light upon the mystery which hung around her death.

'Against that, quite a crowd of idlers—genuinely interested or not—obtained admission to view the body, on the pretext of having lost or mislaid a relative or a friend. At about 8.30 p.m. a young man, very well dressed, drove up to the station in a hansom, and sent in his card to the superintendent. It was Mr Hazeldene, shipping agent, of 11, Crown Lane, E.C., and No. 19, Addison Row, Kensington.

'The young man looked in a pitiable state of mental distress; his hand clutched nervously a copy of the *St James's Gazette*, which contained the fatal news. He said very little to the superintendent except that a person who was very dear to him had not returned home that evening.

'He had not felt really anxious until half an hour ago, when suddenly he thought of looking at his paper. The description of the deceased lady, though vague, had terribly alarmed him. He had jumped into a hansom, and now begged permission to view the body, in order that his worst fears might be allayed.

'You know what followed, of course,' continued the man in the corner, 'the grief of the young man was truly pitiable. In the woman lying there in a public mortuary before him, Mr Hazeldene had recognized his wife.

'I am waxing melodramatic,' said the man in the corner,

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who looked up at Polly with a mild and gentle smile, while his nervous fingers vainly endeavoured to add another knot on the scrappy bit of string with which he was continually playing, 'and I fear that the whole story savours of the penny novelette, but you must admit, and no doubt you remember, that it was an intensely pathetic and truly dramatic moment.

'The unfortunate young husband of the deceased lady was not much worried with questions that night. As a matter of fact, he was not in a fit condition to make any coherent statement. It was at the coroner's inquest on the following day that certain facts came to light, which for the time being seemed to clear up the mystery surrounding Mrs Hazeldene's death, only to plunge that same mystery, later on, into denser gloom than before.

'The first witness at the inquest was, of course, Mr Hazeldene himself. I think everyone's sympathy went out to the young man as he stood before the coroner and tried to throw what light he could upon the mystery. He was well-dressed, as he had been the day before, but he looked terribly ill and worried, and no doubt the fact that he had not shaved gave his face a careworn and neglected air.

'It appears that he and the deceased had been married some six years or so, and that they had always been happy in their married life. They had no children. Mrs Hazeldene seemed to enjoy the best of health till lately, when she had had a slight attack of influenza, in which Dr Arthur Jones had attended her. The doctor was present at this moment, and would no doubt explain to the coroner and the jury whether he thought that Mrs Hazeldene had the slightest tendency to heart disease, which might have had a sudden and fatal ending.

'The coroner was, of course, very considerate to the bereaved husband. He tried by circumlocution to get at the point he wanted, namely, Mrs Hazeldene's mental

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condition lately. Mr Hazeldene seemed loath to talk about this. No doubt he had been warned as to the existence of the small bottle found in his wife's satchel.

"It certainly did seem to me at times", he at last reluctantly admitted, "that my wife did not seem quite herself. She used to be very gay and bright, and lately I often saw her in the evening sitting, as if brooding over some matters, which evidently she did not care to communicate to me."

'Still the coroner insisted, and suggested the small bottle.

"I know, I know", replied the young man, with a short, heavy sigh. "You mean—the question of suicide—I cannot understand it at all—it seems so sudden and so terrible—she certainly had seemed listless and troubled lately—but only at times—and yesterday morning, when I went to business, she appeared quite herself again, and I suggested that we should go to the opera in the evening. She was delighted, I know, and told me she would do some shopping, and pay a few calls in the afternoon."

"Do you know at all where she intended to go when she got into the Underground Railway?"

"Well, not with certainty. You see, she may have meant to get out at Baker Street, and go down to Bond Street to do her shopping. Then, again, she sometimes goes to a shop in St Paul's Churchyard, in which case she would take a ticket to Aldersgate Street; but I cannot say."

"Now, Mr Hazeldene", said the coroner at last very kindly, "will you try to tell me if there was anything in Mrs Hazeldene's life which you know of, and which might in some measure explain the cause of the distressed state of mind, which you yourself had noticed? Did there exist any financial difficulty which might have preyed upon Mrs Hazeldene's mind; was there any friend—to whose intercourse with Mrs Hazeldene—you—er—at any time took exception? In fact", added the coroner, as if thankful

that he had got over an unpleasant moment, "can you give me the slightest indication which would tend to confirm the suspicion that the unfortunate lady, in a moment of mental anxiety or derangement, may have wished to take her own life?"

"There was silence in the court for a few moments. Mr Hazeldene seemed to everyone there present to be labouring under some terrible moral doubt. He looked very pale and wretched, and twice attempted to speak before he at last said in scarcely audible tones:

"No; there were no financial difficulties of any sort. My wife had an independent fortune of her own—she had no extravagant tastes——"

"Nor any friend you at any time objected to?" insisted the coroner.

"Nor any friend, I—at any time objected to", stammered the unfortunate young man, evidently speaking with an effort.

'I was present at the inquest,' resumed the man in the corner, after he had drunk a glass of milk and ordered another, 'and I can assure you that the most obtuse person there plainly realized that Mr Hazeldene was telling a lie. It was pretty plain to the meanest intelligence that the unfortunate lady had not fallen into a state of morbid dejection for nothing, and that perhaps there existed a third person who could throw more light on her strange and sudden death than the unhappy, bereaved young widower.

'That the death was more mysterious even than it had at first appeared became very soon apparent. You read the case at the time, no doubt, and must remember the excitement in the public mind caused by the evidence of the two doctors. Dr Arthur Jones, the lady's usual medical man, who had attended her in a last very slight illness, and who had seen her in a professional capacity fairly recently,

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declared most emphatically that Mrs Hazeldene suffered from no organic complaint which could possibly have been the cause of sudden death. Moreover, he had assisted Mr Andrew Thornton, the district medical officer, in making a post mortem examination, and together they had come to the conclusion that death was due to the action of prussic acid, which had caused instantaneous failure of the heart, but how the drug had been administered neither he nor his colleague were at present able to state.

“Do I understand, then, Dr Jones, that the deceased died, poisoned with prussic acid?”

“Such is my opinion”, replied the doctor.

“Did the bottle found in her satchel contain prussic acid?”

“It had contained some at one time, certainly”.

“In your opinion, then, the lady caused her own death by taking a dose of that drug?”

“Pardon me, I never suggested such a thing: the lady died poisoned by the drug, but how the drug was administered we cannot say. By injection of some sort, certainly. The drug certainly was not swallowed; there was not a vestige of it in the stomach.”

“Yes,” added the doctor in reply to another question from the coroner, “death had probably followed the injection in this case almost immediately; say within a couple of minutes, or perhaps three. It was quite possible that the body would not have more than one quick and sudden convulsion, perhaps not that; death in such cases is absolutely sudden and crushing.”

“I don’t think that at the time anyone in the room realized how important the doctor’s statement was, a statement, which, by the way, was confirmed in all its details by the district medical officer, who had conducted the post mortem. Mrs Hazeldene had died suddenly from an injection of prussic acid, administered no one knew

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how or when. She had been travelling in a first-class railway carriage in a busy time of the day. That young and elegant woman must have had singular nerve and coolness to go through the process of a self-inflicted injection of a deadly poison in the presence of perhaps two or three other persons.

‘Mind you, when I say that no one there realized the importance of the doctor’s statement at that moment, I am wrong; there were three persons, who fully understood at once the gravity of the situation, and the astounding development which the case was beginning to assume.

‘Of course, I should have put myself out of the question,’ added the weird old man, with that inimitable self-conceit peculiar to himself. ‘I guessed then and there in a moment where the police were going wrong, and where they would go on going wrong until the mysterious death on the Underground Railway had sunk into oblivion, together with the other cases which they mismanage from time to time.

‘I said there were three persons who understood the gravity of the two doctors’ statements—the other two were, firstly, the detective who had originally examined the railway carriage, a young man of energy and plenty of misguided intelligence, the other was Mr Hazeldene.

‘At this point the interesting element of the whole story was first introduced into the proceedings, and this was done through the humble channel of Emma Funnel, Mrs Hazeldene’s maid, who, as far as was known then, was the last person who had seen the unfortunate lady alive and had spoken to her.

“Mrs Hazeldene lunched at home,” explained Emma, who was shy, and spoke almost in a whisper; “she seemed well and cheerful. She went out at about half-past three, and told me she was going to Spence’s, in St Paul’s Churchyard to try on her new tailor-made gown. Mrs Hazeldene

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had meant to go there in the morning, but was prevented as Mr Errington called."

"Mr Errington?" asked the coroner casually. "Who is Mr Errington?"

"But this Emma found difficult to explain. Mr Errington was—Mr Errington, that's all.

"Mr Errington was a friend of the family. He lived in a flat in the Albert Mansions. He very often came to Addison Row, and generally stayed late."

'Pressed still further with questions, Emma at last stated that latterly Mrs Hazeldene had been to the theatre several times with Mr Errington, and that on those nights the master looked very gloomy, and was very cross.

'Recalled, the young widower was strangely reticent. He gave forth his answers very grudgingly, and the coroner was evidently absolutely satisfied with himself at the marvellous way in which, after a quarter of an hour of firm yet very kind questionings, he had elicited from the witness what information he wanted.

'Mr Errington was a friend of his wife. He was a gentleman of means, and seemed to have a great deal of time at his command. He himself did not particularly care about Mr Errington, but he certainly had never made any observations to his wife on the subject.

"But who is Mr Errington?" repeated the coroner once more. "What does he do? What is his business or profession?"

"He has no business or profession."

"What is his occupation, then?"

"He has no special occupation. He has ample private means. But he has a great and very absorbing hobby."

"What is that?"

"He spends all his time in chemical experiments, and is, I believe, as an amateur, a very distinguished toxicologist."

‘Did you ever see Mr Errington, the gentleman so closely connected with the mysterious death on the Underground Railway?’ asked the man in the corner as he placed one or two of his little snapshot photos before Miss Polly Burton.

‘There he is, to the very life. Fairly good-looking, a pleasant face enough, but ordinary, absolutely ordinary.

‘It was this absence of any peculiarity which very nearly, but not quite, placed the halter round Mr Errington’s neck.

‘But I am going too fast, and you will lose the thread. The public, of course, never heard how it actually came about that Mr Errington, the wealthy bachelor of Albert Mansions, of the Grosvenor, and other young dandies’ clubs, one fine day found himself before the magistrates at Bow Street, charged with being concerned in the death of Mary Beatrice Hazeldene, late of No. 19, Addison Row.

‘I can assure you both press and public were literally flabbergasted. You see, Mr Errington was a well-known and very popular member of a certain smart section of London society. He was a constant visitor at the opera, the race-course, the Park, and the Carlton, he had a great many friends, and there was consequently quite a large attendance at the police court that morning. What had happened was this:

‘After the very scrappy bits of evidence which came to light at the inquest, two gentlemen bethought themselves that perhaps they had some duty to perform towards the State and the public generally. Accordingly they had come forward offering to throw what light they could upon the mysterious affair on the Underground Railway.

‘The police naturally felt that their information, such as it was, came rather late in the day, but as it proved of paramount importance, and the two gentlemen, moreover, were of undoubtedly good position in the world, they were thankful for what they could get, and acted

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accordingly; they accordingly brought Mr Errington up before the magistrate on a charge of murder.

'The accused looked pale and worried when I first caught sight of him in the court that day, which was not to be wondered at, considering the terrible position in which he found himself. He had been arrested at Marseilles, where he was preparing to start for Colombo.

'I don't think he realized how terrible his position was until later in the proceedings, when all the evidence relating to the arrest had been heard, and Emma Funnel had repeated her statement as to Mr Errington's call at 19, Addison Row, in the morning, and Mrs Hazeldene starting off for St Paul's Churchyard at 3.30 in the afternoon. Mr Hazeldene had nothing to add to the statements he had made at the coroner's inquest. He had last seen his wife alive on the morning of the fatal day. She had seemed very well and cheerful.

'I think everyone present understood that he was trying to say as little as possible that could in any way couple his deceased wife's name with that of the accused.

'And yet, from the servant's evidence, it undoubtedly leaked out that Mrs Hazeldene, who was young, pretty, and evidently fond of admiration, had once or twice annoyed her husband by her somewhat open, yet perfectly innocent flirtation with Mr Errington.

'I think everyone was most agreeably impressed by the widower's moderate and dignified attitude. You will see his photo there, among this bundle. That is just how he appeared in court. In deep black, of course, but without any sign of ostentation in his mourning. He had allowed his beard to grow lately, and wore it closely cut in a point.

'After his evidence, the sensation of the day occurred. A tall, dark-haired man, with the word "City" written metaphorically all over him, had kissed the book, and was waiting to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth.

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‘He gave his name as Andrew Campbell, head of the firm of Campbell & Co., brokers, of Throgmorton Street.

‘In the afternoon of March 18th Mr Campbell, travelling on the Underground Railway, had noticed a very pretty woman in the same carriage as himself. She had asked him if she was in the right train for Aldersgate. Mr Campbell replied in the affirmative, and then buried himself in the Stock Exchange quotations of his evening paper.

‘At Gower Street, a gentleman in a tweed suit and bowler hat got into the carriage, and took a seat opposite the lady. She seemed very much astonished at seeing him, but Mr Campbell did not recollect the exact words she said.

‘The two talked to one another a good deal, and certainly the lady appeared animated and cheerful. Witness took no notice of them; he was very much engrossed in some calculations, and finally got out at Farringdon Street. He noticed that the man in the tweed suit also got out close behind him, having shaken hands with the lady, and said in a pleasant way: “Au revoir! Don’t be late tonight”. Mr Campbell did not hear the lady’s reply, and soon lost sight of the man in the crowd.

‘Everyone was on tenter-hooks, and eagerly waiting for the palpitating moment when witness would describe and identify the man who last had seen and spoken to the unfortunate woman, within five minutes probably of her strange and unaccountable death.

‘Personally I knew what was coming before the Scotch stockbroker spoke. I could have jotted down the graphic and lifelike description he would give of a probable murderer. It would have fitted equally well the man who sat and had luncheon at this table just now; it would certainly have described five out of every ten young Englishmen you know.

‘The individual was of medium height, he wore a

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moustache which was not very fair nor yet very dark, his hair was between colours. He wore a bowler hat, and a tweed suit—and—and—that was all—Mr Campbell might perhaps know him again, but then again, he might not—he was not paying much attention—the gentleman was sitting on the same side of the carriage as himself—and he had his hat on all the time. He himself was busy with his newspaper—yes—he might know him again—but he really could not say.

‘Mr Andrew Campbell’s evidence was not worth very much, you will say. No, it was not in itself, and would not have justified any arrest were it not for the additional statements made by Mr James Verner, manager of Messrs Rodney & Co., colour printers.

‘Mr Verner is a personal friend of Mr Andrew Campbell, and it appears that at Farringdon Street, where he was waiting for his train, he saw Mr Campbell get out of a first-class railway carriage. Mr Verner spoke to him for a second, and then, just as the train was moving off, he stepped into the same compartment which had just been vacated by the stockbroker and the man in the tweed suit. He vaguely recollects a lady sitting in the opposite corner to his own, with her face turned away from him, apparently asleep, but he paid no special attention to her. He was like nearly all business men when they are travelling—engrossed in his paper. Presently a special quotation interested him; he wished to make a note of it, took out a pencil from his waistcoat pocket, and seeing a clean piece of paste-board on the floor, he picked it up, and scribbled on it the memorandum, which he wished to keep. He then slipped the card into his pocket-book.’

“It was only two or three days later”, added Mr Verner in the midst of breathless silence, “that I had occasion to refer to these same notes again.

“In the meanwhile the papers had been full of the

mysterious death on the Underground Railway, and the names of those connected with it were pretty familiar to me. It was, therefore, with much astonishment that on looking at the paste-board which I had casually picked up in the railway carriage I saw the name on it, "Frank Errington".

'There was no doubt that the sensation in court was almost unprecedented. Never since the days of the Fenchurch Street mystery, and the trial of Smethurst, had I seen so much excitement. Mind you, I was not excited—I knew by now every detail of that crime as if I had committed it myself. In fact, I could not have done it better, although I have been a student of crime for many years now. Many people there—his friends, mostly—believed that Errington was doomed. I think he thought so, too, for I could see that his face was terribly white, and he now and then passed his tongue over his lips, as if they were parched.

'You see he was in the awful dilemma—a perfectly natural one, by the way—of being absolutely incapable of proving an alibi. The crime—if crime there was—had been committed three weeks ago. A man about town like Mr Frank Errington might remember that he spent certain hours of a special afternoon at his club, or in the Park, but it is very doubtful in nine cases out of ten if he can find a friend who could positively swear as to having seen him there. No! no! Mr Errington was in a tight corner, and he knew it. You see, there were—besides the evidence—two or three circumstances which did not improve matters for him. His hobby in the direction of toxicology, to begin with. The police had found in his room every description of poisonous substances, including prussic acid.

'Then, again, that journey to Marseilles, the start for Colombo, was, though perfectly innocent, a very unfortunate one. Mr Errington had gone on an aimless voyage,

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but the public thought that he had fled, terrified at his own crime. Sir Arthur Inglewood, however, here again displayed his marvellous skill on behalf of his client by the masterly way in which he literally turned all the witnesses for the Crown inside out.

‘Having first got Mr Andrew Campbell to state positively that in the accused he certainly did *not* recognize the man in the tweed suit, the eminent lawyer, after twenty minutes’ cross-examination, had so completely upset the stock-broker’s equanimity that it is very likely he would not have recognized his own office-boy.

‘But through all his flurry and all his annoyance Mr Andrew Campbell remained very sure of one thing; namely, that the lady was alive and cheerful, and talking pleasantly with the man in the tweed suit up to the moment when the latter, having shaken hands with her, left her with a pleasant “Au revoir! Don’t be late tonight”. He had heard neither scream nor struggle, and in his opinion, if the individual in the tweed suit had administered a dose of poison to his companion, it must have been with her own knowledge and free will; and the lady in the train most emphatically neither looked nor spoke like a woman prepared for a sudden and violent death.

‘Mr James Verner, against that, swore equally positively that he had stood in full view of the carriage door from the moment that Mr Campbell got out until he himself stepped into the compartment, that there was no one else in that carriage between Farringdon Street and Aldgate, and that the lady, to the best of his belief, had made no movement during the whole of that journey.

‘No; Frank Errington was *not* committed for trial on the capital charge’, said the man in the corner with one of his sardonic smiles, ‘thanks to the cleverness of Sir Arthur Inglewood, his lawyer. He absolutely denied his identity with the man in the tweed suit, and swore he had not seen

Mrs Hazeldene since eleven o'clock in the morning of that fatal day. There was no proof that he had; moreover, according to Mr Campbell's opinion, the man in the tweed suit was in all probability not the murderer. Common sense would not admit that a woman could have a deadly poison injected into her without her knowledge, while chatting pleasantly to her murderer.

'Mr Errington lives abroad now. He is about to marry. I don't think any of his real friends for a moment believed that he committed the dastardly crime. The police think they know better. They do know this much, that it could not have been a case of suicide, that if the man who undoubtedly travelled with Mrs Hazeldene on that fatal afternoon had no crime upon his conscience he would long ago have come forward and thrown what light he could upon the mystery.

'As to who that man was, the police in their blindness have not the faintest doubt. Under the unshakable belief that Errington is guilty they have spent the last few months in unceasing labour to try and find further and stronger proofs of his guilt. But they won't find them, because there are none. There are no positive proofs against the actual murderer, for he was one of those clever blackguards who think of everything, foresee every eventuality, who know human nature well and can foretell exactly what evidence will be brought against them, and act accordingly.

'This blackguard from the first kept the figure, the personality, of Frank Errington before his mind. Frank Errington was the dust which the scoundrel threw metaphorically in the eyes of the police, and you must admit that he succeeded in blinding them—to the extent even of making them entirely forget the one simple little sentence, overheard by Mr Andrew Campbell, and which was, of course, the clue to the whole thing—the only slip the cunning rogue made—"Au revoir! Don't be late tonight".

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Mrs Hazeldene was going that night to the opera with her husband.

'You are astonished?' he added with a shrug of the shoulders, 'you do not see the tragedy yet, as I have seen it before me all along. The frivolous young wife, the flirtation with the friend?—all a blind, all pretence. I took the trouble which the police should have taken immediately, of finding out something about the finances of the Hazeldene ménage. Money is in nine cases out of ten the keynote to a crime.'

'I found that the will of Mary Beatrice Hazeldene had been proved by the husband, her sole executor, the estate being sworn at £15,000. I found out, moreover, that Mr Edward Sholto Hazeldene was a poor shipper's clerk when he married the daughter of a wealthy builder in Kensington—and then I made note of the fact that the disconsolate widower had allowed his beard to grow since the death of his wife.'

'There's no doubt that he was a clever rogue,' added the strange creature, leaning excitedly over the table, and peering into Polly's face. 'Do you know how that deadly poison was injected into the poor woman's system? By the simplest of all means, one known to every scoundrel in Southern Europe. A ring—yes! a ring, which has a tiny hollow needle capable of holding a sufficient quantity of prussic acid to have killed two persons instead of one. The man in the tweed suit shook hands with his fair companion—probably she hardly felt the prick, not sufficiently in any case to make her utter a scream. And, mind you, the scoundrel had every facility, through his friendship with Mr Errington, of procuring what poison he required, not to mention his friend's visiting card. We cannot gauge how many months ago he began to try and copy Frank Errington in his style of dress, the cut of his moustache, his general appearance, making the change probably so

gradual, that no one in his own entourage would notice it. He selected for his model a man his own height and build, with the same coloured hair.'

'But there was the terrible risk of being identified by his fellow-traveller in the Underground,' suggested Polly.

'Yes, there certainly was that risk; he chose to take it, and he was wise. He reckoned that several days would in any case elapse before that person, who, by the way, was a business man absorbed in his newspaper, would actually see him again. The great secret of successful crime is to study human nature,' added the man in the corner, as he began looking for his hat and coat. 'Edward Hazeldene knew it well.'

'But the ring?'

'He may have bought that when he was on his honeymoon,' he suggested with a grim chuckle; 'the tragedy was not planned in a week, it may have taken years to mature. But you will own that there goes a frightful scoundrel unhung. I have left you his photograph as he was a year ago, and as he is now. You will see he has shaved his beard again, but also his moustache. I fancy he is a friend now of Mr Andrew Campbell.'

He left Miss Polly Burton wondering, not knowing what to believe.

And that is why she missed her appointment with Mr Richard Frobisher (of the London Mail) to go and see Maud Allan dance at the Palace Theatre that afternoon.

X

The Moabite Cipher

R. Austin Freeman

A large and motley crowd lined the pavements of Oxford Street as Thorndyke and I made our way leisurely eastward. Floral decorations and drooping bunting announced one of those functions inaugurated from time to time by a benevolent Government for the entertainment of fashionable loungers and the relief of distressed pick-pockets. For a Russian Grand Duke, who had torn himself away, amidst valedictory explosions, from a loving if too demonstrative people, was to pass anon on his way to the Guildhall; and a British Prince, heroically indiscreet, was expected to occupy a seat in the ducal carriage.

Near Rathbone Place Thorndyke halted and drew my attention to a smart-looking man who stood lounging in a doorway, cigarette in hand.

'Our old friend Inspector Badger,' said Thorndyke. 'He seems mightily interested in that gentleman in the light overcoat. How d'ye do, Badger?' for at this moment the detective caught his eye and bowed. 'Who is your friend?'

'That's what I want to know, sir,' replied the inspector. 'I've been shadowing him for the last half-hour, but I can't make him out, though I believe I've seen him somewhere. He don't look like a foreigner, but he has got something bulky in his pocket, so I must keep him in sight until the

Duke is safely past. I wish,' he added gloomily, 'these beastly Russians would stop at home. They give us no end of trouble.'

'Are you expecting any—occurrences, then?' asked Thorndyke.

'Bless you, sir,' exclaimed Badger, 'the whole route is lined with plain-clothes men. You see, it is known that several desperate characters followed the Duke to England, and there are a good many exiles living here who would like to have a rap at him. Hallo! What's he up to now?'

The man in the light overcoat had suddenly caught the inspector's too inquiring eye, and forthwith dived into the crowd at the edge of the pavement. In his haste he trod heavily on the foot of a big, rough-looking man, by whom he was in a moment hustled out into the road with such violence that he fell sprawling face downwards. It was an unlucky moment. A mounted constable was just then backing in upon the crowd, and before he could gather the meaning of the shout that arose from the bystanders, his horse had set down one hind-hoof firmly on the prostrate man's back.

The inspector signalled to a constable, who forthwith made a way for us through the crowd; but even as we approached the injured man, he rose stiffly and looked round with a pale, vacant face.

'Are you hurt?' Thorndyke asked gently, with an earnest look into the frightened, wondering eyes.

'No, sir,' was the reply; 'only I feel queer—sinking—just here.'

He laid a trembling hand on his chest, and Thorndyke still eyeing him anxiously, said in a low voice to the inspector: 'Cab or ambulance, as quickly as you can.'

A cab was led round from Newman Street, and the injured man put into it. Thorndyke, Badger, and I entered, and we drove off up Rathbone Place. As we proceeded, our

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patient's face grew more and more ashen, drawn, and anxious; his breathing was shallow and uneven, and his teeth chattered slightly. The cab swung round into Goodge Street, and then—suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye—there came a change. The eyelids and jaw relaxed, the eyes became filmy, and the whole form subsided into the corner in a shrunken heap, with the strange gelatinous limpness of a body that is dead as a whole, while its tissues are still alive.

'God save us! The man's dead!' exclaimed the inspector in a shocked voice—for even policemen have their feelings. He sat staring at the corpse, as it nodded gently with the jolting of the cab, until we drew up inside the courtyard of the Middlesex Hospital, when he got out briskly, with suddenly renewed cheerfulness, to help the porter to place the body on the wheeled couch.

'We shall know who he is now, at any rate,' said he, as we followed the couch to the casualty-room. Thorndyke nodded unsympathetically. The medical instinct in him was for the moment stronger than the legal.

The house surgeon leaned over the couch, and made a rapid examination as he listened to our account of the accident. Then he straightened himself up and looked at Thorndyke.

'Internal haemorrhage, I expect,' said he. 'At any rate, he's dead, poor beggar!—as dead as Nebuchadnezzar. Ah! here comes a bobby; it's his affair now.'

A sergeant came into the room, breathing quickly, and looked in surprise from the corpse to the inspector. But the latter, without loss of time, proceeded to turn out the dead man's pockets, commencing with the bulky object that had first attracted his attention; which proved to be a brown-paper parcel tied up with red tape.

'Pork-pie, begad!' he exclaimed with a crestfallen air as he cut the tape and opened the package. 'You had better go through his other pockets, sergeant.'

The small heap of odds and ends that resulted from this process tended, with a single exception, to throw little light on the man's identity; the exception being a letter, sealed, but not stamped, addressed in an exceedingly illiterate hand to Mr Adolf Schonberg, 213, Greek Street, Soho.

'He was going to leave it by hand, I expect,' observed the inspector, with a wistful glance at the sealed envelope. 'I think I'll take it round myself, and you had better come with me, sergeant.'

He slipped the letter into his pocket, and, leaving the sergeant to take possession of the other effects, made his way out of the building.

'I suppose, Doctor,' he said as we crossed into Berners Street, 'you are not coming our way? Don't want to see Mr Schonberg, h'm?'

Thorndyke reflected for a moment. 'Well, it isn't very far, and we may as well see the end of the incident. Yes; let us go together.'

No. 213, Greek Street, was one of those houses that irresistibly suggest to the observer the idea of a church organ, either jamb of the doorway being adorned with a row of brass bell-handles corresponding to the stop-knobs.

These the sergeant examined with the air of an expert musician, and having, as it were, gauged the capacity of the instrument, selected the middle knob on the right-hand side and pulled it briskly; whereupon a first-floor window was thrown up and a head protruded. But it afforded us a momentary glimpse only, for, having caught the sergeant's upturned eye, it retired with surprising precipitancy, and before we had time to speculate on the apparition, the street door was opened and a man emerged. He was about to close the door after him when the inspector interposed.

'Does Mr Adolf Schonberg live here?'

The new-comer, a very typical Jew of the red-haired

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type, surveyed us thoughtfully through his gold-rimmed spectacles as he repeated the name.

'Schonberg—Schonberg? Ah, yes! I know. He lives on the third floor. I saw him go up a short time ago. Third floor back;' and indicating the open door with a wave of the hand, he raised his hat and passed into the street.

'I suppose we had better go up,' said the inspector, with a dubious glance at the row of bell-pulls. He accordingly started up the stairs, and we all followed in his wake.

There were two doors at the back on the third floor, but as the one was open, displaying an unoccupied bedroom, the inspector rapped smartly on the other. It flew open almost immediately, and a fierce-looking little man confronted us with a hostile stare.

'Well?' said he.

'Mr Adolf Schonberg?' inquired the inspector.

'Well? What about him?' snapped our new acquaintance.

'I wished to have a few words with him,' said Badger.

'Then what the deuce do you come banging at my door for?' demanded the other.

'Why, doesn't he live here?'

'No. First floor front,' replied our friend, preparing to close the door.

'Pardon me,' said Thorndyke, 'but what is Mr Schonberg like? I mean——'

'Like?' interrupted the resident. 'He's like a blooming Sheeny, with a carrotty beard and gold giglamps!' and, having presented this impressionist sketch, he brought the interview to a definite close by slamming the door and turning the key.

With a wrathful exclamation, the inspector turned towards the stairs, down which the sergeant was already clattering in hot haste, and made his way back to the ground floor, followed, as before, by Thorndyke and me. On the doorstep we found the sergeant breathlessly

interrogating a smartly-dressed youth, whom I had seen alight from a hansom as we entered the house, and who now stood with a notebook tucked under his arm, sharpening a pencil with deliberate care.

'Mr James saw him come out, sir,' said the sergeant. 'He turned up towards the Square.'

'Did he seem to hurry?' asked the inspector.

'Rather,' replied the reporter. 'As soon as you were inside he went off like a lamplighter. You won't catch him now.'

'We don't want to catch him,' the detective rejoined gruffly; then, backing out of earshot of the eager pressman, he said in a lower tone: 'That was Mr Schonberg beyond a doubt, and it is clear that he has some reason for making himself scarce; so I shall consider myself justified in opening that note.'

He suited the action to the word, and, having cut the envelope open with official neatness, drew out the enclosure.

'My hat!' he exclaimed, as his eye fell upon the contents. 'What in creation is this? It isn't shorthand, but what the deuce is it?'

He handed the document to Thorndyke, who, having held it up to the light and felt the paper critically, proceeded to examine it with keen interest. It consisted of a single half-sheet of thin notepaper, both sides of which were covered with strange, crabbed characters, written with a brownish-black ink in continuous lines, without any spaces to indicate the divisions into words; and, but for the modern material which bore the writing, it might have been a portion of some ancient manuscript or forgotten codex.

'What do you make of it, Doctor?' inquired the inspector anxiously, after a pause, during which Thorndyke had scrutinized the strange writing with knitted brows.

'Not a great deal,' replied Thorndyke. 'The character

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is the Moabite or Phoenician—primitive Semitic, in fact—and reads from right to left. The language I take to be Hebrew. At any rate, I can find no Greek words, and I see here a group of letters which *may* form one of the few Hebrew words that I know—the word *badim*, “lies”. But you had better get it deciphered by an expert.’

‘If it is Hebrew,’ said Badger, ‘we can manage it all right. There are plenty of Jews at our disposal.’

‘You had much better take the paper to the British Museum,’ said Thorndyke, ‘and submit it to the keeper of the Phoenician antiquities for decipherment.’

Inspector Badger smiled a foxy smile as he deposited the paper in his pocket-book. ‘We’ll see what we can make of it ourselves first,’ he said; ‘but many thanks for your advice, all the same, Doctor. No, Mr James, I can’t give you any information just at present; you had better apply at the hospital.’

‘I suspect,’ said Thorndyke, as we took our way homewards, ‘that Mr James has collected enough material for his purpose already. He must have followed us from the hospital, and I have no doubt that he has his report, with “full details”, mentally arranged at this moment. And I am not sure that he didn’t get a peep at the mysterious paper, in spite of the inspector’s precautions.’

‘By the way,’ I said, ‘what do you make of the document?’

‘A cipher, most probably,’ he replied. ‘It is written in the primitive Semitic alphabet, which, as you know, is practically identical with primitive Greek. It is written from right to left, like the Phoenician, Hebrew, and Moabite, as well as the earliest Greek, inscriptions. The paper is common cream-laid notepaper, and the ink is ordinary indelible Chinese ink, such as is used by draughtsmen. Those are the facts, and without further study of the document itself, they don’t carry us very far.’

‘Why do you think it is a cipher rather than a document in straightforward Hebrew?’

‘Because it is obviously a secret message of some kind. Now, every educated Jew knows more or less Hebrew, and, although he is able to read and write only the modern square Hebrew character, it is so easy to transpose one alphabet into another that the mere language would afford no security. Therefore, I expect that, when the experts translate this document, the translation or transliteration will be a mere farrago of unintelligible nonsense. But we shall see, and meanwhile the facts that we have offer several interesting suggestions which are well worth consideration.’

‘As, for instance—?’

‘Now, my dear Jervis,’ said Thorndyke, shaking an admonitory forefinger at me, ‘don’t, I pray you, give way to mental indolence. You have these few facts that I have mentioned. Consider them separately and collectively, and in their relation to the circumstances. Don’t attempt to suck my brain when you have an excellent brain of your own to suck.’

On the following morning the papers fully justified my colleague’s opinion of Mr James. All the events which had occurred, as well as a number that had not, were given in the fullest and most vivid detail, a lengthy reference being made to the paper ‘found on the person of the dead anarchist,’ and ‘written in a private shorthand or cryptogram.’

The report concluded with the gratifying—though untrue—statement that ‘in this intricate and important case the police have wisely secured the assistance of Dr John Thorndyke, to whose acute intellect and vast experience the portentous cryptogram will doubtless soon deliver up its secret.’

‘Very flattering,’ laughed Thorndyke, to whom I read the extract on his return from the hospital, ‘but a little

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awkward if it should induce our friends to deposit a few trifling mementoes in the form of nitro-compounds on our main staircase or in the cellars. By the way, I met Superintendent Miller on London Bridge. The "cryptogram", as Mr James calls it, has set Scotland Yard in a mighty ferment.'

'Naturally. What have they done in the matter?'

'They adopted my suggestion, after all, finding that they could make nothing of it themselves, and took it to the British Museum. The Museum people referred them to Professor Poppelbaum, the great palæographer, to whom they accordingly submitted it.'

'Did he express any opinion about it?'

'Yes, provisionally. After a brief examination, he found it to consist of a number of Hebrew words sandwiched between apparently meaningless groups of letters. He furnished the Superintendent off-hand with a translation of the words, and Miller forthwith struck off a number of hectograph copies of it, which he has distributed among the senior officials of his department; so that at present—' here Thorndyke gave vent to a soft chuckle '—Scotland Yard is engaged in a sort of missing word—or, rather, missing sense—competition. Miller invited me to join in the sport, and to that end presented me with one of the hectograph copies on which to exercise my wits, together with a photograph of the document.'

'And shall you?' I asked.

'Not I,' he replied, laughing. 'In the first place I have not been formally consulted, and consequently am a passive, though interested spectator. In the second place, I have a theory of my own which I shall test if the occasion arises. But if you would like to take part in the competition, I am authorized to show you the photograph and the translation. I will pass them on to you, and I wish you joy of them.'

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He handed me the photograph and a sheet of paper that he had just taken from his pocket-book, and watched me with grim amusement as I read out the first few lines.

74XHZ6Z7Y3WZD9Δ74Z09ΔZYΔ
W457YΔΦW0470#XTW5W6YΦ6YZ
HIZ4WHY3WYZΔ739Y4W9AX#Y#
W44Φ9ΦW74WH0#5550W63674YZ
ZHIZ4YΔY34Z9ΔΔ7ZY79AX43
4ΦW5770W4X#5936W6YWXYΔ
ZY3WXYΔΔ795ZΔAXW5YWZWZ
5YW3ΦW#W470#94H5W69Y4YZH
HIZY36953Δ47#W79ΔHY9XXW4
#Y#0#344W5W37Y76YZXZ4HΔ
Δ7ZΔ9HX5AX3Z4XW49Y4ΦW7
W64YHYZ34Z96HIZΦ5HY34Y7
74X9AX34YΔW4ΦW7HΦ6W0#5
W445W6Y39Y4WZHZYW043Δ7
93679W044X76ΔW443ΦW70#
W3W6W6ZY7YZHWΦZY4YΔ3Δ

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‘Woe, city, lies, robbery, prey, noise, whip, rattling, wheel, horse, chariot, day, darkness, gloominess, clouds, darkness, morning, mountain, people, strong, fire, them, flame.’

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'It doesn't look very promising at first sight,' I remarked. 'What is the Professor's theory?'

'His theory—provisionally, of course—is that the words form the message, and the groups of letters represent mere filled-up spaces between the words.'

'But surely,' I protested, 'that would be a very transparent device.'

Thorndyke laughed. 'There is a childlike simplicity about it,' said he, 'that is highly attractive—but discouraging. It is much more probable that the words are dummies, and that the letters contain the message. Or, again, the solution may lie in an entirely different direction. But listen! Is that cab coming here?'

It was. It drew up opposite our chambers, and a few moments later a brisk step ascending the stairs heralded a smart rat-tat at our door. Flinging open the latter, I found myself confronted by a well-dressed stranger, who, after a quick glance at me, peered inquisitively over my shoulder into the room.

'I am relieved, Dr Jervis,' said he, 'to find you and Dr Thorndyke at home, as I have come on somewhat urgent professional business. My name,' he continued, entering in response to my invitation, 'is Barton, but you don't know me, though I know you both by sight. I have come to ask you if one of you—or, better still, both—could come to-night and see my brother.'

'That,' said Thorndyke, 'depends on the circumstances and on the whereabouts of your brother.'

'The circumstances,' said Mr Barton, 'are, in my opinion, highly suspicious, and I will place them before you—of course, in strict confidence.'

Thorndyke nodded and indicated a chair.

'My brother,' continued Mr Barton, taking the proffered seat, 'has recently married for the second time. His age is fifty-five, and that of his wife twenty-six, and I may say

that the marriage has been—well, by no means a success. Now, within the last fortnight, my brother has been attacked by a mysterious and extremely painful infection of the stomach, to which his doctor seems unable to give a name. It has resisted all treatment hitherto. Day by day the pain and distress increase, and I feel that, unless something decisive is done, the end cannot be far off.’

‘Is the pain worse after taking food?’ inquired Thorn-dyke.

‘That’s just it!’ exclaimed our visitor. ‘I see what is in your mind, and it has been in mine, too; so much so that I have tried repeatedly to obtain samples of the food that he is taking. And this morning I succeeded.’ Here he took from his pocket a wide-mouthed bottle, which, disengaging from its paper wrappings, he laid on the table. ‘When I called, he was taking his breakfast of arrowroot, which he complained had a gritty taste, supposed by his wife to be due to the sugar. Now I had provided myself with this bottle, and during the absence of his wife, I managed unobserved to convey a portion of the arrowroot that he had left into it, and I should be greatly obliged if you would examine it, and tell me if this arrowroot contains anything that it should not.’

He pushed the bottle across to Thorndyke, who carried it to the window, and, extracting a small quantity of the contents with a glass rod, examined the pasty mass with the aid of a lens; then, lifting the bell-glass cover from the microscope, which stood on its table by the window, he smeared a small quantity of the suspected matter on to a glass slip, and placed it on the stage of the instrument.

‘I observe a number of crystalline particles in this,’ he said, after a brief inspection, ‘which have the appearance of arsenious acid.’

‘Ah!’ ejaculated Mr Barton, ‘just what I feared. But are you certain?’

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'No,' replied Thorndyke; 'but the matter is easily tested.'

He pressed the button of the bell that communicated with the laboratory, a summons that brought the laboratory assistant from his lair with characteristic promptitude.

'Will you please prepare a Marsh's apparatus, Polton,' said Thorndyke.

'I have a couple ready, sir,' replied Polton.

'Then pour the acid into one and bring it to me, with a tile.'

As his familiar vanished silently, Thorndyke turned to Mr Barton.

'Supposing we find arsenic in this arrowroot, as we probably shall, what do you want us to do?'

'I want you to come and see my brother,' replied our client.

'Why not take a note from me to his doctor?'

'No, no; I want you to come—I should like you both to come—and put a stop at once to this dreadful business. Consider! It's a matter of life and death. You won't refuse! I beg you not to refuse me your help in these terrible circumstances.'

'Well,' said Thorndyke, as his assistant reappeared, 'let us first see what the test has to tell us.'

Polton advanced to the table, on which he deposited a small flask, the contents of which were in a state of brisk effervescence, a bottle labelled "calcium hypochlorite", and a white porcelain tile. The flask was fitted with a safety-funnel and a glass tube drawn out to a fine jet, to which Polton cautiously applied a lighted match. Instantly there sprang from the jet a tiny, pale violet flame. Thorndyke now took the tile, and held it in the flame for a few seconds, when the appearance of the surface remained unchanged save for a small circle of condensed moisture. His next proceeding was to thin the arrowroot with distilled water until it was quite fluid, and then pour a small

quantity into the funnel. It ran slowly down the tube into the flask, with the bubbling contents of which it became speedily mixed. Almost immediately a change began to appear in the character of the flame, which from a pale violet turned gradually to a sickly blue, while above it hung a faint cloud of white smoke. Once more Thorndyke held the tile above the jet, but this time no sooner had the pallid flame touched the cold surface of the porcelain, than there appeared on the latter a glistening black stain.

‘That is pretty conclusive,’ observed Thorndyke, lifting the stopper out of the reagent bottle, ‘but we will apply the final test.’ He dropped a few drops of the hypochlorite solution on to the tile, and immediately the black stain faded away and vanished. ‘We can now answer your question, Mr Barton,’ said he, replacing the stopper as he turned to our client. ‘The specimen that you brought us certainly contains arsenic, and in very considerable quantities.’

‘Then,’ exclaimed Mr Barton, starting from his chair, ‘you will come and help me to rescue my brother from this dreadful peril. Don’t refuse me, Dr Thorndyke, for mercy’s sake, don’t refuse.’

Thorndyke reflected for a moment.

‘Before we decide,’ said he, ‘we must see what engagements we have.’

With a quick, significant glance at me, he walked into the office, whither I followed in some bewilderment, for I knew that we had no engagements for the evening.

‘Now, Jervis,’ said Thorndyke, as he closed the office door, ‘what are we to do?’

‘We must go, I suppose,’ I replied. ‘It seems a pretty urgent case.’

‘It does,’ he agreed. ‘Of course, the man may be telling the truth, after all.’

‘You don’t think he is, then?’

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'No. It is a plausible tale, but there is too much arsenic in that arrowroot. Still, I think I ought to go. It is an ordinary professional risk. But there is no reason why you should put your head into the noose.'

'Thank you,' said I, somewhat huffily. 'I don't see what risk there is, but if any exists I claim the right to share it.'

'Very well,' he answered with a smile, 'we will both go. I think we can take care of ourselves.'

He re-entered the sitting-room, and announced his decision to Mr Barton, whose relief and gratitude were quite pathetic.

'But,' said Thorndyke, 'you have not yet told us where your brother lives.'

'Rexford,' was the reply—'Rexford, in Essex. It is an out-of-the-way place, but if we catch the seven-fifteen train from Liverpool Street, we shall be there in an hour and a half.'

'And as to the return? You know the trains, I suppose?'

'Oh yes,' replied our client; 'I will see that you don't miss your train back.'

'Then I will be with you in a minute,' said Thorndyke; and taking the still-bubbling flask, he retired to the laboratory, whence he returned in a few minutes carrying his hat and overcoat.

The cab which had brought our client was still waiting, and we were soon rattling through the streets towards the station, where we arrived in time to furnish ourselves with dinner-baskets and select our compartment at leisure.

During the early part of the journey our companion was in excellent spirits. He despatched the cold fowl from the basket and quaffed the rather indifferent claret with as much relish as if he had not had a single relation in the world, and after dinner he became genial to the verge of hilarity. But, as time went on, there crept into his manner

a certain anxious restlessness. He became silent and preoccupied, and several times furtively consulted his watch.

'The train is confoundedly late!' he exclaimed irritably. 'Seven minutes behind time already!'

'A few minutes more or less are not of much consequence,' said Thorndyke.

'No of course not; but still—Ah, thank heaven, here we are!'

He thrust his head out of the off-side window, and gazed eagerly down the line; then, leaping to his feet, he bustled out on to the platform while the train was still moving. Even as we alighted a warning bell rang furiously on the up-platform, and as Mr Barton hurried us through the empty booking-office to the outside of the station, the rumble of the approaching train could be heard above the noise made by our own train moving off.

'My carriage doesn't seem to have arrived yet,' exclaimed Mr Barton, looking anxiously up the station approach. 'If you will wait here a moment, I will go and make inquiries.'

He darted back into the booking-hall and through it on to the platform, just as the up-train roared into the station. Thorndyke followed him with quick but stealthy steps, and peering out of the booking-office door, watched his proceedings; then he turned and beckoned to me.

'There he goes,' said he, pointing to an iron foot-bridge that spanned the line; and, as I looked, I saw, clearly defined against the dim night sky, a flying figure racing towards the 'up' side.

It was hardly two-thirds across when the guard's whistle sang out its shrill warning.

'Quick, Jervis,' exclaimed Thorndyke; 'she's off!'

He leaped down on to the line, whither I followed instantly, and, crossing the rails, we clambered up together

on to the foot-board opposite an empty first-class compartment. Thorndyke's magazine knife, containing, among other implements, a railway-key, was already in his hand. The door was speedily unlocked, and, as we entered, Thorndyke ran through and looked out on to the platform.

'Just in time!' he exclaimed. 'He is in one of the forward compartments.'

He relocked the door, and, seating himself, proceeded to fill his pipe.

'And now,' said I, as the train moved out of the station, 'perhaps you will explain this little comedy.'

'With pleasure,' he replied, 'if it needs any explanation. But you can hardly have forgotten Mr James's flattering remarks in his report of the Greek Street incident, clearly giving the impression that the mysterious document was in my possession. When I read that, I knew I must look out for some attempt to recover it, though I hardly expected such promptness. Still, when Mr Barton called without credentials or appointment, I viewed him with some suspicion. That suspicion deepened when he wanted us both to come. It deepened further when I found an impossible quantity of arsenic in his sample, and it gave place to certainty when, having allowed him to select the trains by which we were to travel, I went up to the laboratory and examined the time-table; for I then found that the last train for London left Rexford ten minutes after we were due to arrive. Obviously this was a plan to get us both safely out of the way while he and some of his friends ransacked our chambers for the missing documents.'

'I see; and that accounts for his extraordinary anxiety at the lateness of the train. But why did you come, if you knew it was a "plant"?''

'My dear fellow,' said Thorndyke, 'I never miss an interesting experience if I can help it. There are possibilities in this, too, don't you see?'

'But supposing his friends have broken into our chambers already?'

'That contingency has been provided for; but I think they will wait for Mr Barton—and us.'

Our train, being the last one up, stopped at every station, and crawled slothfully in the intervals, so that it was past eleven o'clock when we reached Liverpool Street. Here we got out cautiously, and, mingling with the crowd, followed the unconscious Barton up the platform, through the barrier, and out into the street. He seemed in no special hurry, for, after pausing to light a cigar, he set off at an easy pace up New Broad Street.

Thorndyke hailed a hansom, and, motioning me to enter, directed the cabman to drive to Clifford's Inn Passage.

'Sit well back,' said he, as we rattled away up New Broad Street. 'We shall be passing our gay deceiver presently—in fact, there he is, a living, walking illustration of the folly of underrating the intelligence of one's adversary.'

At Clifford's Inn Passage we dismissed the cab, and, retiring into the shadow of the dark, narrow alley, kept an eye on the gate of Inner Temple Lane. In about twenty minutes we observed our friend approaching on the south side of Fleet Street. He halted at the gate, plied the knocker, and after a brief parley with the night-porter vanished through the wicket. We waited yet five minutes more, and then, having given him time to get clear of the entrance we crossed the road.

The porter looked at us with some surprise.

'There's a gentleman just gone down to your chambers, sir,' said he. 'He told me you were expecting him.'

'Quite right,' said Thorndyke, with a dry smile. 'I was. Good night.'

We slunk down the lane, past the church, and through the gloomy cloisters, giving a wide berth to all lamps and

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lighted entries, until, emerging into Paper Buildings, we crossed at the darkest part to King's Bench Walk, where Thorndyke made straight for the chambers of our friend Anstey, which were two doors above our own.

'Why are we coming here?' I asked, as we ascended the stairs.

But the question needed no answer when we reached the landing, for through the open door of our friend's chambers I could see in the darkened room Anstey himself with two uniformed constables and a couple of plain-clothes men.

'There has been no signal yet, sir,' said one of the latter, whom I recognized as a detective-sergeant of our division.

'No,' said Thorndyke, 'but the M.C. has arrived. He came in five minutes before us.'

'Then,' exclaimed Anstey, 'the hall will open shortly, ladies and gents. The boards are waxed, the fiddlers are tuning up, and——'

'Not quite so loud, if you please, sir,' said the sergeant. 'I think there is somebody coming up Crown Office Row.'

The ball had, in fact, opened. As we peered cautiously out of the open window, keeping well back in the darkened room, a stealthy figure crept out of the shadow, crossed the road, and stole noiselessly into the entry of Thorndyke's chambers. It was quickly followed by a second figure, and then by a third, in which I recognized our elusive client.

'Now listen for the signal,' said Thorndyke. 'They won't waste time. Confound that clock!'

The soft-voiced bell of the Inner Temple clock, mingling with the harsher tones of St Dunstan's and the Law Courts, slowly tolled out the hour of midnight; and as the last reverberations were dying away, some metallic object, apparently a coin, dropped with a sharp clink on to the pavement under our window.

At the sound the watchers simultaneously sprang to their feet.

'You two go first,' said the sergeant, addressing the uniformed men, who thereupon stole noiselessly, in their rubber-soled boots, down the stone stairs and along the pavement. The rest of us followed, with less attention to silence, and as we ran up to Thorndyke's chambers, we were aware of quick but stealthy footsteps on the stairs above.

'They've been at work, you see,' whispered one of the constables, flashing his lantern on to the iron-bound outer door of our sitting-room, on which the marks of a large jemmy were plainly visible.

The sergeant nodded grimly, and, bidding the constables to remain on the landing, led the way upwards.

As we ascended, faint rustlings continued to be audible from above, and on the second-floor landing we met a man descending briskly, but without hurry, from the third. It was Mr Barton, and I could not but admire the composure with which he passed the two detectives. But suddenly his glance fell on Thorndyke, and his composure vanished. With a wild stare of incredulous horror, he halted as if petrified; then he broke away and raced furiously down the stairs, and a moment later a muffled shout and the sound of a scuffle told us that he had received a check. On the next flight we met two more men, who, more hurried and less self-possessed, endeavoured to push past; but the sergeant barred the way.

'Why, bless me!' exclaimed the latter, 'it's Moakey; and isn't that Tom Harris?'

'It's all right, sergeant,' said Moakey plaintively, striving to escape from the officer's grip. 'We've come to the wrong house, that's all.'

The sergeant smiled indulgently. 'I know,' he replied. 'But you're always coming to the wrong house, Moakey; and now you're just coming along with me to the right house.'

He slipped his hand inside his captive's coat, and

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adroitly fished out a large, folding jemmy; whereupon the discomfited burglar abandoned all further protest.

On our return to the first-floor, we found Mr Barton sulkily awaiting us, handcuffed to one of the constables, and watched by Polton with pensive disapproval.

‘I needn’t trouble you tonight, Doctor,’ said the sergeant, as he marshalled his little troop of captors and captives. ‘You’ll hear from us in the morning. Good night, sir.’

The melancholy procession moved off down the stairs, and we retired into our chambers with Anstey to smoke a last pipe.

‘A capable man, that Barton,’ observed Thorndyke—‘ready, plausible, and ingenious, but spoilt by prolonged contact with fools. I wonder if the police will perceive the significance of this little affair.’

‘They will be more acute than I am if they do,’ said I.

‘Naturally,’ interposed Anstey, who loved to “cheek” his revered senior, ‘because there isn’t any. It’s only Thorndyke’s bounce. He is really in a deuce of a fog himself.’

However this may have been, the police were a good deal puzzled by the incident, for, on the following morning, we received a visit from no less a person than Superintendent Miller, of Scotland Yard.

‘This is a queer business,’ said he, coming to the point at once—‘this burglary, I mean. Why should they want to crack your place, right here in the Temple, too? You’ve got nothing of value here, have you? No “hard stuff”, as they call it, for instance?’

‘Not so much as a silver teaspoon,’ replied Thorndyke, who had a conscientious objection to plate of all kinds.

‘It’s odd,’ said the superintendent, ‘deuced odd. When we got your note, we thought these anarchist idiots had mixed you up with the case—you saw the papers, I suppose—and wanted to go through your rooms for some reason.

We thought we had our hands on the gang, instead of which we find a party of common crooks that we're sick of the sight of. I tell you, sir, it's annoying when you think you've hooked a salmon, to bring up a blooming eel.'

'It must be a great disappointment,' Thorndyke agreed, suppressing a smile.

'It is,' said the detective. 'Not but what we're glad enough to get these beggars, especially Halkett, or Barton, as he calls himself—a mighty slippery customer is Halkett, and mischievous, too—but we're not wanting any disappointments just now. There was that big jewel job in Piccadilly, Taplin and Horne's; I don't mind telling you that we've not got the ghost of a clue. Then there's this anarchist affair. We're all in the dark there, too.'

'But what about the cipher?' asked Thorndyke.

'Oh, hang the cipher!' exclaimed the detective irritably. 'This Professor Poppelbaum may be a very learned man, but he doesn't help *us* much. He says the document is in Hebrew, and he has translated it into Double Dutch. Just listen to this!' He dragged out of his pocket a bundle of papers, and, dabbing down a photograph of the document before Thorndyke, commenced to read the Professor's report.

"The document is written in the characters of the well-known inscription of Mesha, King of Moab." (Who the devil's he? Never heard of him. Well known, indeed!) "The language is Hebrew, and the words are separated by groups of letters, which are meaningless, and obviously introduced to mislead and confuse the reader. The words themselves are not strictly consecutive, but, by the interpolation of certain other words, a series of intelligible sentences is obtained, the meaning of which is not very clear, but is no doubt allegorical. The method of decipherment is shown in the accompanying tables, and the full rendering suggested on the enclosed sheet. It is to be noted that the writer of

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this document was apparently quite unacquainted with the Hebrew language, as appears from the absence of any grammatical construction." That's the Professor's report, Doctor, and here are the tables showing how he worked it out. It makes my head spin to look at 'em.'

He handed to Thorndyke a bundle of ruled sheets, which my colleague examined attentively for a while, and then passed on to me.

'This is very systematic and thorough,' said he. 'But now let us see the final result at which he arrives.'

'It may be all very systematic,' growled the superintendent, sorting out his papers, 'but I tell you, sir, it's all BOSH!' The latter word he jerked out viciously, as he slapped down on the table the final product of the Professor's labours. 'There,' he continued, 'that's what he calls the "full rendering", and I reckon it'll make your hair curl. It might be a message from Bedlam.'

Analysis of the cipher with transliteration into modern square Hebrew characters with a translation into English.
N.B. The cipher reads from right to left.

Moabite Hebrew Translation	Space יג	Word יגאג גאג LIES	Space ג	Word גזו ג CITY	Space גא	Word גזא ג WOE
Moabite Hebrew Translation	ג	גאג ג NOISE	ג	גאג ג PREY	ג	גאג ג ROBBERY
Moabite Hebrew Translation	גא	גאג ג WHEEL	ג	גאג ג RATTLING	ג	גאג ג WHIP
Moabite Hebrew Translation	יג	גאג ג DAY	ג	גאג ג CHARIOT	גאג	גאג ג HORSE

The Professor's Analysis.

Thorndyke took up the first sheet, and as he compared the constructed renderings with the literal translation, the ghost of a smile stole across his usually immovable countenance.

‘The meaning is certainly a little obscure,’ he observed, ‘though the reconstruction is highly ingenious; and, moreover, I think the Professor is probably right. That is to say, the words which he has supplied are probably the omitted parts of the passages from which the words of the cryptogram were taken. What do you think, Jervis?’

He handed me the two papers, of which one gave the actual words of the cryptogram, and the other a suggested reconstruction, with omitted words supplied. The first read:

‘Woe	city	lies	robbery	prey
noise	whip	rattling	wheel	horse
chariot	day	darkness	gloominess	
cloud	darkness	morning	mountain	
people	strong	fire	them	flame.’

Turning to the second paper, I read out the suggested rendering:

“‘Woe to the bloody city! It is full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not. The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots.

“‘A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds, and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains, a great people and a strong.

“‘A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth.”’

Here the first sheet ended, and, as I laid it down, Thorndyke looked at me inquiringly.

‘There is a good deal of reconstruction in proportion to

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the original matter,' I objected. 'The Professor has "supplied" more than three-quarters of the final rendering.'

'Exactly,' burst in the superintendent; 'it's all Professor and no cryptogram.'

'Still, I think the reading is correct,' said Thorndyke, 'As far as it goes, that is.'

'Good Lord!' exclaimed the dismayed detective. 'Do you mean to tell me, sir, that that balderdash is the real meaning of the thing?'

'I don't say that,' replied Thorndyke. 'I say it is correct as far as it goes; but I doubt its being the solution of the cryptogram.'

'Have you been studying that photograph that I gave you?' demanded Miller, with sudden eagerness.

'I have looked at it,' said Thorndyke evasively, 'but I should like to examine the original if you have it with you.'

'I have,' said the detective. 'Professor Poppelbaum sent it back with the solution. You can have a look at it, though I can't leave it with you without special authority.'

He drew the document from his pocket-book and handed it to Thorndyke, who took it over to the window and scrutinized it closely. From the window he drifted into the adjacent office, closing the door after him; and presently the sound of a faint explosion told me that he had lighted the gas-fire.

'Of course,' said Miller, taking up the translation again, 'this gibberish is the sort of stuff you might expect from a parcel of crack-brained anarchists; but it doesn't seem to mean anything.'

'Not to us,' I agreed; 'but the phrases may have some pre-arranged significance. And then there are the letters between the words. It is possible that they may really form a cipher.'

'I suggested that to the Professor,' said Miller, 'but he wouldn't hear of it. He is sure they are only dummies.'

‘I think he is probably mistaken, and so, I fancy, does my colleague. But we shall hear what he has to say presently.’

‘Oh, I know what he will say,’ growled Miller. ‘He will put the thing under the microscope, and tell us who made the paper, and what the ink is composed of, and then we shall be just where we were.’ The superintendent was evidently deeply depressed.

We sat for some time pondering in silence on the vague sentences of the Professor’s translation, until, at length, Thorndyke reappeared, holding the document in his hand. He laid it quietly on the table by the officer, and then inquired:

‘Is this an official consultation?’

‘Certainly,’ replied Miller. ‘I was authorized to consult you respecting the translation, but nothing was said about the original. Still, if you want it for further study, I will get it for you.’

‘No, thank you,’ said Thorndyke. ‘I have finished with it. My theory turned out to be correct.’

‘Your theory?’ exclaimed the superintendent, eagerly. ‘Do you mean to say——?’

‘And, as you are consulting me officially, I may as well give you this.’

He held out a sheet of paper, which the detective took from him and began to read.

‘What is this?’ he asked, looking up at Thorndyke with a puzzled frown. ‘Where did it come from?’

‘It is the solution of the cryptogram,’ replied Thorndyke.

The detective re-read the contents of the paper, and, with the frown of perplexity deepening, once more gazed at my colleague.

‘This is a joke, sir; you are fooling me,’ he said sulkily.

‘Nothing of the kind,’ answered Thorndyke. ‘That is the genuine solution.’

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'But it's impossible!' exclaimed Miller. 'Just look at it, Dr Jervis.'

I took the paper from his hand, and, as I glanced at it, I had no difficulty in understanding his surprise. It bore a short inscription in printed Roman capitals, thus:

'THE PICKERDILLEY STUF IS UP THE CHIMBLY
416 WARDOUR STREET 2ND FLOUR BACK IT WAS
HID BECOS OF OLD MOAKEYS JOOD MOAKEY IS A
BLITER.'

'Then that fellow wasn't an anarchist at all?' I exclaimed.

'No,' said Miller. 'He was one of Moakey's gang. We suspected Moakey of being mixed up with that job, but we couldn't fix it on him. By Jove!' he added, slapping his thigh, 'if this is right, and I can lay my hands on the loot! Can you lend me a bag, doctor? I'm off to Wardour Street this very moment.'

We furnished him with an empty suitcase, and, from the window, watched him making for Mitre Court at a smart double.

'I wonder if he will find the booty,' said Thorndyke. 'It depends on whether the hiding-place was known to more than one of the gang. Well, it has been a quaint case, and instructive, too. I suspect our friend Barton and the evasive Schonberg were the collaborators who produced that curiosity of literature.'

'May I ask how you deciphered the thing?' I said. 'It didn't appear to take long.'

'It didn't. It was merely a matter of testing a hypothesis; and you ought not to have to ask that question,' he added, with mock severity, 'seeing that you had what turns out to have been all the necessary facts, two days ago. But I will prepare a document and demonstrate to you tomorrow morning.'

'So Miller was successful in his quest,' said Thorndyke, as we smoked our morning pipes after breakfast. 'The "entire swag", as he calls it, was "up the chimblly", undisturbed.'

He handed me a note which had been left, with the empty suitcase, by a messenger, shortly before, and I was about to read it when an agitated knock was heard at our door. The visitor, whom I admitted, was a rather haggard and dishevelled elderly gentleman, who, as he entered, peered inquisitively through his concave spectacles from one of us to the other.

'Allow me to introduce myself, gentlemen,' said he. 'I am Professor Poppelbaum.'

Thorndyke bowed and offered a chair.

'I called yesterday afternoon,' our visitor continued, 'at Scotland Yard, where I heard of your remarkable decipherment and of the convincing proof of its correctness. Thereupon I borrowed the cryptogram, and have spent the entire night studying it, but I cannot connect your solution with any of the characters. I wonder if you would do me the great favour of enlightening me as to your method of decipherment, and so save me further sleepless nights? You may rely on my discretion.'

'Have you the document with you?' asked Thorndyke.

The Professor produced it from his pocket-book, and passed it to my colleague.

'You observe, Professor,' said the latter, 'that this is a laid paper, and has no water-mark?'

'Yes, I noticed that.'

'And that the writing is in indelible Chinese ink?'

'Yes, yes,' said the savant impatiently; 'but it is the inscription that interests me, not the paper and ink.'

'Precisely,' said Thorndyke. 'Now, it was the ink that interested me when I caught a glimpse of the document three days ago. "Why", I asked myself, "should anyone

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use this troublesome medium"—for this appears to be stick ink—"when good writing ink is to be had?" What advantages has Chinese ink over writing ink? It has several advantages as a drawing ink, but for writing purposes it has only one: it is quite unaffected by wet. The obvious inference, then, was that this document was, for some reason, likely to be exposed to wet. But this inference instantly suggested another, which I was yesterday able to put to the test—thus.'

He filled a tumbler with water, and, rolling up the document, dropped it in. Immediately there began to appear on it a new set of characters of a curious grey colour. In a few seconds Thorndyke lifted out the wet paper, and held it up to the light, and now there was plainly visible an inscription in transparent lettering, like a very distinct water-mark. It was in printed Roman capitals, written across the other writing, and read:

'The Pickerdilly stuf is up the chimbly 416 Wardour St 2nd flour back it was hid becos of old Moakeys jood moakey is a bliter.'

The Professor regarded the inscription with profound disfavour.

'How do you suppose this was done?' he asked gloomily.

'I will show you,' said Thorndyke. 'I have prepared a piece of paper to demonstrate the process to Dr Jervis. It is exceedingly simple.'

He fetched from the office a small plate of glass, and a photographic dish in which a piece of thin notepaper was soaking in water.

'This paper,' said Thorndyke, lifting it out and laying it on the glass, 'has been soaking all night, and is now quite pulpy.'

He spread a dry sheet of paper over the wet one, and on the former wrote heavily with a hard pencil, 'Moakey is a

bliter'. On lifting the upper sheet, the writing was seen to be transferred in a deep grey to the wet paper, and when the latter was held up to the light the inscription stood out clear and transparent as if written with oil.

'When this dries,' said Thorndyke, 'the writing will completely disappear, but it will reappear whenever the paper is again wetted.'

The Professor nodded.

'Very ingenious,' said he—'a sort of artificial palimpsest, in fact. But I do not understand how that illiterate man could have written in the difficult Moabite script.'

'He did not,' said Thorndyke. 'The "cryptogram" was probably written by one of the leaders of the gang, who, no doubt, supplied copies to the other members to use instead of blank paper for secret communications. The object of the Moabite writing was evidently to divert attention from the paper itself, in case the communication fell into the wrong hands, and I must say it seems to have answered its purpose very well.'

The Professor started, stung by the sudden recollection of his labours.

'Yes,' he snorted; 'but I am a scholar, sir, not a policeman. Every man to his trade.'

He snatched up his hat, and with a curt 'Good morning', flung out of the room in dudgeon.

Thorndyke laughed softly.

'Poor Professor!' he murmured. 'Our playful friend Barton has much to answer for.'

XI

The Woman in the Big Hat

The Baroness Orczy

Lady Molly always had the idea that if the finger of Fate had pointed to Mathis' in Regent Street, rather than to Lyons', as the most advisable place for us to have a cup of tea that afternoon, Mr Culledon would be alive at the present moment.

My dear lady is quite sure—and needless to say that I share her belief in herself—that she would have anticipated the murderer's intentions, and thus prevented one of the most cruel and callous of crimes which were ever perpetrated in the heart of London.

She and I had been to a *matinée* of 'Trilby', and were having tea at Lyons', which is exactly opposite Mathis' Vienna café in Regent Street. From where we sat we commanded a view of the street and of the café, which had been very crowded during the last hour.

We had lingered over our toasted muffin until past six, when our attention was drawn to the unusual commotion which had arisen both outside and in the brilliantly lighted place over the road.

We saw two men run out of the doorway, and return a minute or two later in company with a policeman. You

know what is the inevitable result of such a proceeding in London. Within three minutes a crowd had collected outside Mathis'. Two or three more constables had already assembled, and had some difficulty in keeping the entrance clear of intruders.

But already my dear lady, keen as a pointer on the scent, had hastily paid her bill, and, without waiting to see if I followed her or not, had quickly crossed the road, and the next moment her graceful form was lost in the crowd.

I went after her, impelled by curiosity, and presently caught sight of her in close conversation with one of our own men. I have always thought that Lady Molly must have eyes at the back of her head, otherwise how could she have known that I stood behind her now? Anyway, she beckoned to me, and together we entered Mathis', much to the astonishment and anger of the less fortunate crowd.

The usually gay little place was indeed sadly transformed. In one corner the waitresses, in dainty caps and aprons, had put their heads together, and were eagerly whispering to one another whilst casting furtive looks at the small group assembled in front of one of those pretty alcoves, which, as you know, line the walls all round the big tea-room at Mathis'.

Here two of our men were busy with pencil and notebook, whilst one fair-haired waitress, dissolved in tears, was apparently giving them a great deal of irrelevant and confused information.

Chief Inspector Saunders had, I understood, been already sent for; the constables, confronted with this extraordinary tragedy, were casting anxious glances towards the main entrance, whilst putting the conventional questions to the young waitress.

And in the alcove itself, raised from the floor of the room by a couple of carpeted steps, the cause of all this

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commotion, all this anxiety, and all these tears, sat huddled up on a chair, with arms lying straight across the marble-topped table, on which the usual paraphernalia of afternoon tea still lay scattered about. The upper part of the body, limp, backboneless, and awry, half propped up against the wall, half falling back upon the outstretched arms, told quite plainly its weird tale of death.

Before my dear lady and I had time to ask any questions, Saunders arrived in a taxicab. He was accompanied by the medical officer, Dr Townson, who at once busied himself with the dead man, whilst Saunders went up quickly to Lady Molly.

'The chief suggested sending for you,' he said quickly; 'he was phoning you when I left. There's a woman in this case, and we shall rely on you a good deal.'

'What has happened?' asked my dear lady, whose fine eyes were glowing with excitement at the mere suggestion of work.

'I have only a few stray particulars,' replied Saunders, 'but the chief witness is that yellow-haired girl over there. We'll find out what we can from her directly Dr Townson has given us his opinion.'

The medical officer, who had been kneeling beside the dead man, now rose and turned to Saunders. His face was very grave.

'The whole matter is simple enough, so far as I am concerned,' he said. 'The man has been killed by a terrific dose of morphia—administered, no doubt, in this cup of chocolate,' he added, pointing to a cup in which there still lingered the cold dregs of the thick beverage.'

'But when did this occur?' asked Saunders, turning to the waitress.

'I can't say,' she replied, speaking with obvious nervousness. 'The gentleman came in very early with a lady, somewhere about four. They made straight for this alcove.'

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The place was just beginning to fill, and the music had begun.'

'And where is the lady now?'

'She went off almost directly. She had ordered tea for herself and a cup of chocolate for the gentleman, also muffins and cakes. About five minutes afterwards, as I went past their table, I heard her say to him, "I am afraid I must go now, or Jay's will be closed, but I'll be back in less than half an hour. You'll wait for me, won't you?"'

'Did the gentleman seem all right then?'

'Oh, yes,' said the waitress. 'He had just begun to sip his chocolate, and merely said "S'long" as she gathered up her gloves and muff and then went out of the shop.'

'And she has not returned since?'

'No.'

'When did you first notice there was anything wrong with this gentleman?' asked Lady Molly.

'Well,' said the girl with some hesitation, 'I looked at him once or twice as I went up and down, for he certainly seemed to have fallen all of a heap. Of course, I thought that he had gone to sleep, and I spoke to the manageress about him, but she thought that I ought to leave him alone for a bit. Then we got very busy, and I paid no more attention to him, until about six o'clock, when most afternoon tea customers had gone, and we were beginning to get the tables ready for dinners. Then I certainly did think there was something wrong with the man. I called to the manageress, and we sent for the police.'

'And the lady who was with him at first, what was she like? Would you know her again?' queried Saunders.

'I don't know,' replied the girl; 'you see, I have to attend to such crowds of people of an afternoon, I can't notice each one. And she had on one of those enormous mushroom hats; no one could have seen her face—not more than her chin—unless they looked right under the hat.'

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'Would you know the hat again?' asked Lady Molly.

'Yes—I think I should,' said the waitress. 'It was black velvet and had a lot of plumes. It was enormous,' she added, with a sigh of admiration and of longing for the monumental headgear.

During the girl's narrative one of the constables had searched the dead man's pockets. Among other items, he had found several letters addressed to Mark Culledon, Esq., some with an address in Lombard Street, others with one in Fitzjohn's Avenue, Hampstead. The initials M.C., which appeared both in the hat and on the silver mount of a letter-case belonging to the unfortunate gentleman, proved his identity beyond a doubt.

A house in Fitzjohn's Avenue does not, somehow suggest a bachelor establishment. Even whilst Saunders and the other men were looking through the belongings of the deceased, Lady Molly had already thought of his family—children, perhaps a wife, a mother—who could tell?

What awful news to bring to an unsuspecting, happy family, who might even now be expecting the return of father, husband, or son, at the very moment when he lay murdered in a public place, the victim of some hideous plot or feminine revenge!

As our amiable friends in Paris would say, it jumped to the eyes that there was a woman in the case—a woman who had worn a gargantuan hat for the obvious purpose of remaining unidentifiable when the question of the unfortunate victim's companion that afternoon came up for solution. And all these facts to put before an expectant wife or an anxious mother!

As, no doubt, you have already foreseen, Lady Molly took the difficult task on her own kind shoulders. She and I drove together to Lorbury House, Fitzjohn's Avenue, and on asking of the manservant who opened the door if his

mistress were at home, we were told that Lady Irene Culledon was in the drawing-room.

Mine is not a story of sentiment, so I am not going to dwell on that interview, which was one of the most painful moments I recollect having lived through.

Lady Irene was young—not five-and-twenty, I should say—petite and frail-looking, but with a quiet dignity of manner which was most impressive. She was Irish, as you know, the daughter of the Earl of Athyville, and, it seems, had married Mr Mark Culledon in the teeth of strenuous opposition on the part of her family, which was as penniless as it was aristocratic, whilst Mr Culledon had great prospects and a splendid business, but possessed neither ancestors nor high connections. She had only been married six months, poor little soul, and from all accounts must have idolized her husband.

Lady Molly broke the news to her with infinite tact, but there it was! It was a terrific blow—wasn't it?—to deal to a young wife—now a widow; and there was so little that a stranger could say in these circumstances. Even my dear lady's gentle voice, her persuasive eloquence, her kindly words, sounded empty and conventional in the face of such appalling grief.

2

Of course, everyone expected that the inquest would reveal something of the murdered man's inner life—would, in fact, allow the over-eager public to get a peep into Mr Mark Culledon's secret orchard, wherein walked a lady who wore abnormally large velvet hats, and who nourished in her heart one of those terrible grudges against a man which can only find satisfaction in crime.

Equally, of course, the inquest revealed nothing that the public did not already know. The young widow was extremely reticent on the subject of her late husband's

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life, and the servants had all been fresh arrivals when the young couple, just home from their honeymoon, organized their new household at Lorbury House.

There was an old aunt of the deceased—a Mrs Steinberg—who lived with the Culledons, but who at the present moment was very ill. Someone in the house—one of the younger servants, probably—very foolishly had told her every detail of the awful tragedy. With positively amazing strength, the invalid thereupon insisted on making a sworn statement, which she desired should be placed before the coroner's jury. She wished to bear solemn testimony to the integrity of her late nephew, Mark Cullodon, in case the personality of the mysterious woman in the big hat suggested to evilly disposed minds any thoughts of scandal.

'Mark Cullodon was the one nephew whom I loved,' she stated with solemn emphasis. 'I have shown my love for him by bequeathing to him the large fortune which I inherited from the late Mr Steinberg. Mark was the soul of honour, or I should have cut him out of my will as I did my other nephews and nieces. I was brought up in a Scotch home, and I hate all this modern fastness and smartness, which are only other words for what I call profligacy.'

Needless to say, the old lady's statement, solemn though it was, was of no use whatever for the elucidation of the mystery which surrounded the death of Mr Mark Cullodon. But as Mrs Steinberg had talked of 'other nephews', whom she had cut out of her will in favour of the murdered man, the police directed inquiries in those various quarters.

Mr Mark Cullodon certainly had several brothers and sisters, also cousins, who at different times—usually for some peccadillo or other—seemed to have incurred the wrath of the strait-laced old lady. But there did not appear to have been any ill-feeling in the family owing to this. Mrs Steinberg was sole mistress of her fortune. She might just as well have bequeathed it in toto to some hospital as

to one particular nephew whom she favoured, and the various relations were glad, on the whole, that the money was going to remain in the family rather than be cast abroad.

The mystery surrounding the woman in the big hat deepened as the days went by. As you know, the longer the period of time which elapses between a crime and the identification of the criminal, the greater chance the latter has of remaining at large.

In spite of strenuous efforts and close questionings of every one of the employees at Mathis', no one could give a very accurate description of the lady who had tea with the deceased on that fateful afternoon.

The first glimmer of light on the mysterious occurrence was thrown, about three weeks later, by a young woman named Katherine Harris, who had been parlourmaid at Lorbury House when first Mr and Lady Irene Cullodon returned from their honeymoon.

I must tell you that Mrs Steinberg had died a few days after the inquest. The excitement had been too much for her enfeebled heart. Just before her death she had deposited £250 with her banker, which sum was to be paid over to any person giving information which would lead to the apprehension and conviction of the murderer of Mr Mark Cullodon.

This offer had stimulated everyone's zeal, and, I presume, had aroused Katherine Harris to a realization of what had all the while been her obvious duty.

Lady Molly saw her in the chief's private office, and had much ado to disentangle the threads of the girl's confused narrative. But the main point of Harris's story was that a foreign lady had once called at Lorbury House, about a week after the master and mistress had returned from their honeymoon. Lady Irene was out at the time, and Mr Cullodon saw the lady in his smoking-room.

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'She was a very handsome lady,' explained Harris, 'and was beautifully dressed.'

'Did she wear a large hat?' asked the chief.

'I don't remember if it was particularly large,' replied the girl.

'But you remember what the lady was like?' suggested Lady Molly.

'Yes, pretty well. She was very, very tall, and very good-looking.'

'Would you know her again if you saw her?' rejoined my dear lady.

'Oh, yes; I think so,' was Katherine Harris's reply.

Unfortunately, beyond this assurance the girl could say nothing very definite. The foreign lady seems to have been closeted with Mr Cullodon for about an hour, at the end of which time Lady Irene came home.

The butler being out that afternoon it was Harris who let her mistress in, and as the latter asked no questions, the girl did not volunteer the information that her master had a visitor. She went back to the servants' hall, but five minutes later the smoking-room bell rang, and she had to run up again. The foreign lady was then in the hall alone, and obviously waiting to be shown out. This Harris did, after which Mr Cullodon came out of his room, and, in the girl's own graphic words, 'he went on dreadful'.

'I didn't know I 'ad done anything so very wrong,' she explained, 'but the master seemed quite furious, and said I wasn't a proper parlour-maid, or I'd have known that visitors must not be shown in straight away like that. I ought to have said that I didn't know if Mr Cullodon was in; that I would go and see. Oh, he did go on at me!' continued Katherine Harris, volubly. 'And I suppose he complained to the mistress, for she give me notice the next day.'

'And you have never seen the foreign lady since?' concluded Lady Molly.

ound me, and I—I prefer Parma violets,' she added, raising a daintily perfumed handkerchief to her nose.

'Then you have come to make a statement?' asked the chief.

'Yes,' she replied; 'I'll tell you all I know. Mr Culledon was engaged to marry me; then he met the daughter of an earl, and thought he would like her better as a wife than a simple Miss Lowenthal. I suppose I should be considered an undesirable match for a young man who has a highly respectable and snobbish aunt, who would leave him all her money only on the condition that he made a suitable marriage. I have a voice, and I came over to England two years ago to study English, so that I might sing in oratorio at the Albert Hall. I met Mark on the Calais-Dover boat, when he was returning from a holiday abroad. He fell in love with me, and presently he asked me to be his wife. After some demur, I accepted him; we became engaged, but he told me that our engagement must remain a secret, for he had an old aunt from whom he had great expectations, and who might not approve of his marrying a foreign girl, who was without connections and a professional singer. From that moment I mistrusted him, nor was I very astonished when gradually his affection for me seemed to cool. Soon after he informed me quite callously that he had changed his mind, and was going to marry some swell English lady. I didn't care much, but I wanted to punish him by making a scandal, you understand. I went to his house just to worry him, and finally I decided to bring an action for breach of promise against him. It would have upset him, I know; no doubt his aunt would have cut him out of her will. That is all I wanted, but I did not care enough about him to murder him.'

Somehow her tale carried conviction. We were all of us obviously impressed. The chief alone looked visibly disturbed, and I could read what was going on in his mind.

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'As you say, Miss Lowenthal,' he rejoined, 'the police would have found all this out within the next few hours. Once your connection with the murdered man was known to us, the record of your past and his becomes an easy one to peruse. No doubt, too,' he added insinuatingly, 'our men would soon have been placed in possession of the one undisputable proof of your complete innocence with regard to that fateful afternoon spent at Mathis' café.'

'What is that?' she queried blandly.

'An alibi.'

'You mean, where I was during the time that Mark was being murdered in a tea shop?'

'Yes,' said the chief.

'I was out for a walk,' she replied quietly.

'Shopping, perhaps?'

'No.'

'You met someone who would remember the circumstance—or your servants could say at what time you came in?'

'No,' she repeated dryly; 'I met no-one, for I took a brisk walk on Primrose Hill. My two servants could only say that I went out at three o'clock that afternoon and returned after five.'

There was silence in the little office for a moment or two. I could hear the scraping of the pen with which the chief was idly scribbling geometrical figures on his blotting pad.

Lady Molly was quite still. Her large, luminous eyes were fixed on the beautiful woman who had just told us her strange story, with its unaccountable sequel, its mystery which had deepened with the last phrase which she had uttered. Miss Lowenthal, I felt sure, was conscious of her peril. I am not sufficiently a psychologist to know whether it was guilt or merely fear which was distorting the handsome features now, hardening the face and causing the lips to tremble.

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Lady Molly scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper, which she then passed over to the chief. Miss Lowenthal was making visible efforts to steady her nerves.

'That is all I have to tell you,' she said, in a voice which sounded dry and harsh. 'I think I will go home now.'

But she did not rise from her chair, and seemed to hesitate as if fearful lest permission to go were not granted her.

To her obvious astonishment—and, I must add, to my own—the chief immediately rose and said, quite urbanely:

'I thank you very much for the helpful information which you have given me. Of course, we may rely on your presence in town for the next few days, may we not?'

She seemed greatly relieved, and all at once resumed her former charm of manner and elegance of attitude. The beautiful face was lit up by a smile.

The chief was bowing to her in quite a foreign fashion, and in spite of her visible reassurance she eyed him very intently. Then she went up to Lady Molly and held out her hand.

My dear lady took it without an instant's hesitation. I, who knew that it was the few words hastily scribbled by Lady Molly which had dictated the chief's conduct with regard to Miss Lowenthal, was left wondering whether the woman I loved best in all the world had been shaking hands with a murderess.

4.

No doubt you will remember the sensation which was caused by the arrest of Miss Lowenthal, on a charge of having murdered Mr Mark Cullodon, by administering morphia to him in a cup of chocolate at Mathis' cafe in Regent Street.

The beauty of the accused, her undeniable charm of manner, the hitherto blameless character of her life, all

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tended to make the public take violent sides either for or against her, and the usual budget of amateur correspondence, suggestions, recriminations and advice poured into the chief's office in titanic proportions.

I must say that, personally, all my sympathies went out to Miss Lowenthal. As I have said before, I am no psychologist, but I had seen her in the original interview at the office, and I could not get rid of an absolutely unreasoning certitude that the beautiful Viennese singer was innocent.

The magistrate's court was packed, as you may well imagine, on that first day of the inquiry; and, of course, sympathy with the accused went up to fever pitch when she staggered into the dock, beautiful still, despite the ravages caused by horror, anxiety, fear, in face of the deadly peril in which she stood.

The magistrate was most kind to her; her solicitor was unimpeachably assiduous; even our fellows, who had to give evidence against her, did no more than their duty, and were as lenient in their statements as possible.

Miss Lowenthal had been arrested in her flat by Danvers, accompanied by two constables. She had loudly protested her innocence all along, and did so still, pleading 'Not guilty' in a firm voice.

The great points in favour of the arrest were, firstly, the undoubted motive of disappointment and revenge against a faithless sweetheart, then the total inability to prove any kind of alibi, which, under the circumstances, certainly added to the appearance of guilt.

The question of where the fatal drug was obtained was more difficult to prove. It was stated that Mr Mark Cullodon was director of several important companies, one of which carried on business as wholesale druggists.

Therefore it was argued that the accused, at different times and under some pretext or other, had obtained drugs from Mr Cullodon himself. She had admitted to having

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visited the deceased at his office in the City, both before and after his marriage.

Miss Lowenthal listened to all this evidence against her with a hard, set face, as she did also to Katherine Harris's statement about her calling on Mr Cullodon at Lorbury House, but she brightened up visibly when the various attendants at Mathis' café were placed in the box.

A very large hat belonging to the accused was shown to the witnesses, but, though the police upheld the theory that this was the headgear worn by the mysterious lady at the café on that fatal afternoon, the waitresses made distinctly contradictory statements with regard to it.

Whilst one girl swore that she recognized the very hat, another was equally positive that it was distinctly smaller than the one she recollected, and when the hat was placed on the head of Miss Lowenthal, three out of the four witnesses positively refused to identify her.

Most of these young women declared that though the accused, when wearing the big hat, looked as if she might have been the lady in question, yet there was a certain something about her which was different.

With that vagueness which is a usual and highly irritating characteristic of their class, the girls finally parried every question by refusing to swear positively either for or against the identity of Miss Lowenthal.

'There's something that's different about her somehow,' one of the waitresses asserted positively.

'What is it that's different?' asked the solicitor for the accused, pressing his point.

'I can't say,' was the perpetual, maddening reply.

Of course the poor young widow had to be dragged into the case, and here, I think, opinions and even expressions of sympathy were quite unanimous.

The whole tragedy had been inexpressibly painful to her, of course, and now it must have seemed doubly so. The

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scandal which had accumulated round her late husband's name must have added the poignancy of shame to that of grief. Mark Cullodon had behaved as callously to the girl whom clearly he had married from interested, family motives, as he had to the one whom he had heartlessly cast aside.

Lady Irene, however, was most moderate in her statements. There was no doubt that she had known of her husband's previous entanglement with Miss Lowenthal, but apparently had not thought fit to make him accountable for the past. She did not know that Miss Lowenthal had threatened a breach of promise action against her husband.

Throughout her evidence she spoke with absolute calm and dignity, and looked indeed a strange contrast, in her closely fitting tailor-made costume of black serge and tiny black toque, to the more brilliant woman who stood in the dock.

The two great points in favour of the accused were, firstly, the vagueness of the witnesses who were called to identify her, and, secondly, the fact that she had undoubtedly begun proceedings for breach of promise against the deceased. Judging by the latter's letters to her, she would have had a splendid case against him, which fact naturally dealt a severe blow to the theory as to motive for the murder.

On the whole, the magistrate felt that there was not a sufficiency of evidence against the accused to warrant his committing her for trial; he therefore discharged her, and, amid loud applause from the public, Miss Lowenthal left the court a free woman.

Now, I know that the public did loudly, and, to my mind, very justly, blame the police for that arrest, which was denounced as being as cruel as it was unjustifiable. I felt as strongly as anybody on the subject, for I knew that the prosecution had been instituted in defiance of Lady

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Molly's express advice, and in distinct contradiction to the evidence which she had collected. When, therefore, the chief again asked my dear lady to renew her efforts in that mysterious case, it was small wonder that her enthusiasm did not respond to his anxiety. That she would do her duty was beyond a doubt, but she had very naturally lost her more fervent interest in the case.

The mysterious woman in the big hat was still the chief subject of leading articles in the papers, coupled with that of the ineptitude of the police who could not discover her. There were caricatures and picture post-cards in all the shop windows of a gigantic hat covering the whole figure of its wearer, only the feet and a very long and pointed chin, protruding from beneath the enormous brim. Below was the device, 'Who is she? Ask the police?'

One day—it was the second since the discharge of Miss Lowenthal—my dear lady came into my room beaming. It was the first time I had seen her smile for more than a week, and already I had guessed what it was that had cheered her.

'Good news, Mary,' she said gaily. 'At last I've got the chief to let me have a free hand. Oh, dear! what a lot of argument it takes to extricate that man from the tangled meshes of red tape!'

'What are you going to do?' I asked.

'Prove that my theory is right as to who murdered Mark Cullodon,' she replied seriously; 'and as a preliminary we'll go and ask his servants at Lorbury House a few questions.'

It was then three o'clock in the afternoon. At Lady Molly's bidding, I dressed somewhat smartly, and together we went off in a taxi to Fitzjohn's Avenue. Lady Molly had written a few words on one of her cards, urgently requesting an interview with Lady Irene Cullodon. This she handed over to the man-servant who opened the

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door at Lorbury House. A few moments later we were sitting in the cosy boudoir. The young widow, high-bred and dignified in her tight-fitting black gown, sat opposite to us, her white hands folded demurely before her, her small head, with its very close coiffure, bent in closest attention towards Lady Molly.

'I most sincerely hope, Lady Irene,' began my dear lady, in her most gentle and persuasive voice, 'that you will look with all possible indulgence on my growing desire—shared, I may say, by all my superiors at Scotland Yard—to elucidate the mystery which still surrounds your late husband's death.'

Lady Molly paused, as if waiting for encouragement to proceed. The subject must have been extremely painful to the young widow; nevertheless she responded quite gently:

'I can understand that the police wish to do their duty in the matter; as for me, I have done all, I think, that could be expected of me. I am not made of iron, and after that day in the police court—'

She checked herself, as if afraid of having betrayed more emotion than was consistent with good breeding, and concluded more calmly:

'I cannot do any more.'

'I fully appreciate your feelings in the matter,' said Lady Molly, 'but you would not mind helping me—would you—in a passive way, if you could, by some simple means, further the cause of justice?'

'What is it you want me to do?' asked Lady Irene.

'Only to allow me to ring for two of your maids and to ask them a few questions. I promise you that they shall not be of such a nature as to cause you the slightest pain.'

For a moment I thought that the young widow hesitated, then, without a word, she rose and rang the bell.

'Which of my servants did you wish to see?' she asked,

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turning to my dear lady as soon as the butler entered in answer to the bell. ,

'Your own maid and your parlour-maid, if I may,' replied Lady Molly.

Lady Irene gave the necessary orders, and we all sat expectant and silent until, a minute or two later, two girls entered the room. One wore a cap and apron, the other, in neat black dress and dainty lace collar, was obviously the lady's maid.

'This lady,' said their mistress, addressing the two girls, 'wishes to ask you a few questions. She is a representative of the police, so you had better do your best to satisfy her with your answers.'

'Oh!' rejoined Lady Molly pleasantly—choosing not to notice the tone of acerbity with which the young widow had spoken, nor the unmistakable barrier of hostility and reserve which her words had immediately raised between the young servants and the 'representative of the police'—'what I am going to ask these two young ladies is neither very difficult nor very unpleasant. I merely want their kind help in a little comedy which will have to be played this evening, in order to test the accuracy of certain statements made by one of the waitresses at Mathis' tea shop with regard to the terrible tragedy which has darkened this house. You will do that much, will you not?' she added, speaking directly to the maids.

No one can be so winning or so persuasive as my dear lady. In a moment I saw the girls' hostility melting before the sunshine of Lady Molly's smile.

'We'll do what we can, ma'am,' said the maid.

'That's a brave, good girl!' replied my lady. 'You must know that the chief waitress at Mathis' has, this very morning, identified the woman in the big hat who, we all believe, murdered your late master. Yes!' she continued, in response to a gasp of astonishment which seemed to go

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round the room like a wave, 'the girl seems quite positive, both as regards the hat and the woman who wore it. But, of course, one cannot allow a human life to be sworn away without bringing every possible proof to bear on such a statement, and I am sure that everyone in this house will understand that we don't want to introduce strangers more than we can help into this sad affair, which already has been bruited abroad too much.'

She paused a moment; then, as neither Lady Irene nor the maids made any comment, she continued:

'My superiors at Scotland Yard think it their duty to try and confuse the witness as much as possible in her act of identification. They desire that a certain number of ladies wearing abnormally large hats should parade before the waitress. Among them will be, of course, the one whom the girl has already identified as being the mysterious person who had tea with Mr Culedon at Mathis' that afternoon.

'My superiors can then satisfy themselves whether the waitress is or is not so sure of her statement that she invariably picks out again and again one particular individual amongst a number of others or not.'

'Surely,' interrupted Lady Irene, dryly, 'you and your superiors do not expect my servants to help in such a farce?'

'We don't look upon such a proceeding as a farce, Lady Irene,' rejoined Lady Molly, gently. 'It is often resorted to in the interests of an accused person, and we certainly would ask the co-operation of your household.'

'I don't see what they can do.'

But the two girls did not seem unwilling. The idea appealed to them, I felt sure; it suggested an exciting episode, and gave promise of variety in their monotonous lives.

'I am sure both these young ladies possess fine big hats,' continued Lady Molly with an encouraging smile.

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'I should not allow them to wear ridiculous headgear,' retorted Lady Irene, sternly.

'I have the one your ladyship wouldn't wear and throw away,' interposed the young parlour-maid. 'I put it together again with the scraps I found in the dusthole.'

There was just one instant of absolute silence, one of those magnetic moments when Fate seems to have dropped the spool on which she was spinning the threads of a life, and is just stooping in order to pick it up.

Lady Irene raised a black-bordered handkerchief to her lips, then said quietly:

'I don't know what you mean, Mary. I never wear big hats.'

'No, my lady,' here interposed the lady's maid; 'but Mary means the one you ordered at Sanchia's and only wore the once—the day you went to that concert.'

'Which day was that?' asked Lady Molly, blandly.

'Oh! I couldn't forget that day,' ejaculated the maid; 'her ladyship came home from the concert—I had undressed her, and she told me that she would never wear her big hat again—it was too heavy. That same day Mr Cullodon was murdered.'

'That hat would answer our purpose very well,' said Lady Molly, quite calmly. 'Perhaps Mary will go and fetch it, and you had better go and help her put it on.'

The two girls went out of the room without another word, and there were we three women left facing one another, with that awful secret, only half-revealed, hovering in the air like an intangible spectre.

'What are you going to do, Lady Irene?' asked Lady Molly, after a moment's pause, during which I literally could hear my own heart beating, whilst I watched the rigid figure of the widow in deep black crepe, her face set and white, her eyes fixed steadily on Lady Molly.

'You can't prove it!' she said defiantly.

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'I think we can,' rejoined Lady Molly, simply; 'at any rate, I mean to try. I have two of the waitresses from Mathis' outside in a cab, and I have already spoken to the attendant who served you at Sanchia's, an obscure milliner in a back street near Portland Road. We know that you were at great pains there to order a hat of certain dimensions and to your own minute description; it was a copy of one you had once seen Miss Lowenthal wear when you met her at your late husband's office. We can prove that meeting, too. Then we have your maid's testimony that you wore that same hat once, and once only, the day, presumably, that you went out to a concert—a statement which you will find it difficult to substantiate—and also the day on which your husband was murdered.'

'Bah! the public will laugh at you!' retorted Lady Irene, still defiantly. 'You would not dare to formulate so monstrous a charge!'

'It will not seem monstrous when justice has weighed in the balance the facts which we can prove. Let me tell you a few of these, the result of careful investigation. There is the fact that you knew of Mr Culledon's entanglement with Miss Elizabeth Lowenthal, and did your best to keep it from old Mrs Steinberg's knowledge, realizing that any scandal round her favourite nephew would result in the old lady cutting him—and therefore you—out of her will. You dismissed a parlour-maid for the sole reason that she had been present when Miss Lowenthal was shown into Mr Culledon's study. There is the fact that Mrs Steinberg had so worded her will that, in the event of her nephew dying before her, her fortune would devolve on you; the fact that, with Miss Lowenthal's action for breach of promise against your husband, your last hope of keeping the scandal from the old lady's ears had effectually vanished. You saw the fortune eluding your grasp; you feared Mrs Steinberg would alter her will. Had you found the means,

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and had you dared, would you not rather have killed the old lady? But discovery would have been certain. The other crime was bolder and surer. You have inherited the old lady's millions, for she never knew of her nephew's earlier peccadilloes.

'All this we can state and prove, and the history of the hat, bought, and worn one day only, that same memorable day, and then thrown away.'

A loud laugh interrupted her—a laugh that froze my very marrow.

'There is one fact you have forgotten, my lady of Scotland Yard,' came in sharp, strident accents from the black-robed figure, which seemed to have become strangely spectral in the fast gathering gloom which had been enveloping the luxurious little boudoir. 'Don't omit to mention the fact that the accused took the law into her own hands.'

And before my dear lady and I could rush to prevent her, Lady Irene Cullodon had conveyed something—we dared not think what—to her mouth.

'Find Danvers quickly, Mary!' said Lady Molly, calmly. 'You'll find him outside. Bring a doctor back with you.'

Even as she spoke Lady Irene, with a cry of agony, fell senseless in my dear lady's arms.

The doctor, I may tell you, came too late. The unfortunate woman evidently had a good knowledge of poison. She had been determined not to fail; in case of discovery she was ready and able to mete out justice to herself.

I don't think the public ever knew the real truth about the woman in the big hat. Interest in her went the way of all things. Yet my dear lady had been right from beginning to end. With unerring precision she had placed her dainty finger on the real motive and the real perpetrator of the crime—the ambitious woman who had married solely for money, and meant to have that money even at the cost of

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one of the most dastardly murders that have ever darkened the criminal annals of this country.

I asked Lady Molly what it was that first made her think of Lady Irene as the possible murderess. No one else for a moment had thought her guilty.

‘The big hat,’ replied my dear lady with a smile. ‘Had the mysterious woman at Mathis’ been tall, the waitresses would not, one and all, have been struck by the abnormal size of the hat. The wearer must have been petite, hence the reason that under a wide brim only the chin would be visible. I at once sought for a small woman. Our fellows did not think of that, because they are men.’

You see how simple it all was!

XII

The Horse of the Invisible

William Hope Hodgson

I had that afternoon received an invitation from Carnacki. When I reached his place I found him sitting alone. As I came into the room he rose with a perceptibly stiff movement and extended his left hand. His face seemed to be badly scarred and bruised and his right hand was bandaged. He shook hands and offered me his paper, which I refused. Then he passed me a handful of photographs and returned to his reading.

Now, that is just Carnacki. Not a word had come from him and not a question from me. He would tell us all about it later. I spent about half an hour looking at the photographs which were chiefly 'snaps' (some by flashlight) of an extraordinarily pretty girl; though in some of the photographs it was wonderful that her prettiness was so evident for so frightened and startled was her expression that it was difficult not to believe that she had been photographed in the presence of some imminent and overwhelming danger.

The bulk of the photographs were of interiors of different rooms and passages and in every one the girl might be seen, either full length in the distance or closer, with perhaps

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little more than a hand or arm or portion of the head or dress included in the photograph. All of these had evidently been taken with some definite aim that did not have for its first purpose the picturing of the girl, but obviously of her surroundings and they made me very curious, as you can imagine.

Near the bottom of the pile, however, I came upon something *definitely* extraordinary. It was a photograph of the girl standing abrupt and clear in the great blaze of a flashlight, as was plain to be seen. Her face was turned a little upward as if she had been frightened suddenly by some noise. Directly above her, as though half-formed and coming down out of the shadows, was the shape of a single, enormous hoof.

I examined this photograph for a long time without understanding it more than that it had probably to do with some queer case in which Carnacki was interested.

When Jessop, Arkright and Taylor came in Carnacki quietly held out his hand for the photographs which I returned in the same spirit and afterwards we all went in to dinner. When we had spent a quiet hour at the table we pulled our chairs round and made ourselves snug and Carnacki began:

‘I’ve been North,’ he said, speaking slowly and painfully between puffs at his pipe. ‘Up to Hisgins of East Lancashire. It has been a pretty strange business all round, as I fancy you chaps will think, when I have finished. I knew before I went, something about the “horse story”, as I have heard it called; but I never thought of it coming my way, somehow. Also I know *now* that I never considered it seriously—in spite of my rule always to keep an open mind. Funny creatures, we humans!’

‘Well, I got a wire asking for an appointment, which of course told me that there was some trouble. On the date I fixed old Captain Hisgins himself came up to see me. He

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told me a great many new details about the horse story; though naturally I had always known the main points and understood that if the first child were a girl, that girl would be haunted by the Horse during her courtship.

‘It is, as you can see already, an extraordinary story and though I have always known about it, I have never thought it to be anything more than an old-time legend, as I have already hinted. You see, for seven generations the Hisgins family have had men children for their first-born and even the Hisgins themselves have long considered the tale to be little more than a myth.

‘To come to the present, the eldest child of the reigning family is a girl and she has been often teased and warned in jest by her friends and relations that she is the first girl to be the eldest for seven generations and that she would have to keep her men friends at arm’s length or go into a nunnery if she hoped to escape the haunting. And this, I think, shows us how thoroughly the tale had grown to be considered as nothing worthy of the least serious thought. Don’t you think so?

‘Two months ago Miss Hisgins became engaged to Beaumont, a young Naval Officer, and on the evening of the very day of the engagement, before it was even formally announced, a most extraordinary thing happened which resulted in Captain Hisgins making the appointment and my ultimately going down to their place to look into the thing.

‘From the old family records and papers that were entrusted to me I found that there could be no possible doubt that prior to something like a hundred and fifty years ago there were some very extraordinary and disagreeable coincidences, to put the thing in the least emotional way. In the whole of the two centuries prior to that date there were five first-born girls out of a total of seven generations of the family. Each of these girls grew up to maidenhood

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and each became engaged, and each one died during the period of engagement, two by suicide, one by falling from a window, one from a "broken heart" (presumably heart failure, owing to sudden shock through fright). The fifth girl was killed one evening in the park round the house; but just how, there seemed to be no *exact* knowledge; only that there was an impression that she had been kicked by a horse. She was dead when found.

'Now, you see, all of these deaths might be attributed in a way—even the suicides—to natural causes, I mean as distinct from supernatural. You see? Yet, in every case the maidens had undoubtedly suffered some extraordinary and terrifying experiences during their various courtships; for in all of the records there was mention either of the neighing of an unseen horse or of the sounds of an invisible horse galloping, as well as many other peculiar and quite inexplicable manifestations. You begin to understand now, I think, just how extraordinary a business it was that I was asked to look into.

'I gathered from one account that the haunting of the girls was so constant and horrible that two of the girls' lovers fairly ran away from their lady-loves. And I think it was this, more than anything else that made me feel that there had been something more in it than a mere succession of uncomfortable coincidences.

'I got hold of these facts before I had been many hours in the house and after this I went pretty carefully into the details of the thing that happened on the night of Miss Hisgins' engagement to Beaumont. It seems that as the two of them were going through the big lower corridor, just after dusk and before the lamps had been lighted, there had been a sudden, horrible neighing in the corridor, close to them. Immediately afterward Beaumont received a tremendous blow or kick which broke his right forearm. Then the rest of the family and the servants came running

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to know what was wrong. Lights were brought and the corridor and, afterwards, the whole house searched, but nothing unusual was found.

'You can imagine the excitement in the house and the half incredulous, half believing talk about the old legend. Then, later, in the middle of the night the old Captain was waked by the sound of a great horse galloping round and round the house.

'Several times after this both Beaumont and the girl said that they had heard the sounds of hoofs near to them after dusk, in several of the rooms and corridors.

'Three nights later Beaumont was waked by a strange neighing in the night-time seeming to come from the direction of his sweetheart's bedroom. He ran hurriedly for her father and the two of them raced to her room. They found her awake and ill with sheer terror, having been awakened by the neighing, seemingly close to her bed.

'The night before I arrived, there had been a fresh happening and they were all in a frightfully nervy state, as you can imagine.

'I spent most of the first day, as I have hinted, in getting hold of details; but after dinner I slacked off and played billiards all the evening with Beaumont and Miss Higsins. We stopped about ten o'clock and had coffee and I got Beaumont to give me full particulars about the thing that had happened the evening before.

'He and Miss Higsins had been sitting quietly in her aunt's boudoir whilst the old lady chaperoned them, behind a book. It was growing dusk and the lamp was at her end of the table. The rest of the house was not yet lit as the evening had come earlier than usual.

'Well, it seems that the door into the hall was open and suddenly the girl said: "H'sh! what's that?"

'They both listened and then Beaumont heard it—the sound of a horse outside of the front door.

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“Your father?” he suggested, but she reminded him that her father was not riding.

‘Of course they were both ready to feel queer, as you can suppose, but Beaumont made an effort to shake this off and went into the hall to see whether anyone was at the entrance. It was pretty dark in the hall and he could see the glass panels of the inner draught-door, clear-cut in the darkness of the hall. He walked over to the glass and looked through into the drive beyond, but there was nothing in sight.

‘He felt nervous and puzzled and opened the inner door and went out on to the carriage-circle. Almost directly afterward the great hall door swung to with a crash behind him. He told me that he had a sudden awful feeling of having been trapped in some way—that is how he put it. He whirled round and gripped the door handle, but something seemed to be holding it with a vast grip on the other side. Then, before he could be fixed in his mind that this was so, he was able to turn the handle and open the door.

‘He paused a moment in the doorway and peered into the hall, for he had hardly steadied his mind sufficiently to know whether he was really frightened or not. Then he heard his sweetheart blow him a kiss out of the greyness of the big, unlit hall and he knew that she had followed him from the boudoir. He blew her a kiss back and stepped inside the doorway, meaning to go to her. And then, suddenly, in a flash of sickening knowledge he knew that it was not his sweetheart who had blown him that kiss. He knew that something was trying to tempt him alone into the darkness and that the girl had never left the boudoir. He jumped back and in the same instant of time he heard the kiss again, nearer to him. He called out at the top of his voice: “Mary, stay in the boudoir. Don’t move out of the boudoir until I come to you.” He heard her call something in reply from the boudoir and then he had struck

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a clump of a dozen or so matches and was holding them above his head and looking round the hall. There was no one in it, but even as the matches burned out there came the sounds of a great horse galloping down the empty drive.

'Now you see, both he and the girl had heard the sounds of the horse galloping; but when I questioned more closely I found that the aunt had heard nothing, though it is true she is a bit deaf, and she was further back in the room. Of course, both he and Miss Hisgins had been in an extremely nervous state and ready to hear anything. The door might have been slammed by a sudden puff of wind owing to some inner door being opened; and as for the grip on the handle, that may have been nothing more than the sneck catching.

'With regard to the kisses and the sounds of the horse galloping, I pointed out that these might have seemed ordinary enough sounds, if they had been only cool enough to reason. As I told him, and as he knew, the sounds of a horse galloping carry a long way on the wind so that what he had heard might have been nothing more than a horse being ridden some distance away. And as for the kiss, plenty of quiet noises—the rustle of a paper or a leaf—have a somewhat similar sound, especially if one is in an overstrung condition and imagining things.

'I finished preaching this little sermon on common-sense versus hysteria as we put out the lights and left the billiard room. But neither Beaumont nor Miss Hisgins would agree that there had been any fancy on their parts.

'We had come out of the billiard room by this time and were going along the passage and I was still doing my best to make both of them see the ordinary, commonplace possibilities of the happening, when what killed my pig, as the saying goes, was the sound of a hoof in the dark billiard room we had just left.

'I felt the "creep" come on me in a flash, up my spine

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and over the back of my head. Miss Hisgins whooped like a child with the whooping-cough and ran up the passage, giving little gasping screams. Beaumont, however, ripped round on his heels and jumped back a couple of yards. I gave back too, a bit, as you can understand.

"“There it is,” he said in a low, breathless voice. “Perhaps you’ll believe now.”

““There’s certainly something,” I whispered, never taking my gaze off the closed door of the billiard room. ““H’sh!” he muttered. “There it is again.”

“There was a sound like a great horse pacing round and round the billiard room with slow, deliberate steps. A horrible cold fright took me so that it seemed impossible to take a full breath, you know the feeling, and then I saw we must have been walking backwards for we found ourselves suddenly at the opening of the long passage.

“We stopped there and listened. The sounds went on steadily with a horrible sort of deliberateness, as if the brute were taking a sort of malicious gusto in walking about all over the room which we had just occupied. Do you understand just what I mean?

“Then there was a pause and a long time of absolute quiet except for an excited whispering from some of the people down in the big hall. The sound came plainly up the wide stairway. I fancy they were gathered round Miss Hisgins, with some notion of protecting her.

“I should think Beaumont and I stood there, at the end of the passage, for about five minutes, listening for any noise in the billiard room. Then I realized what a horrible funk I was in and I said to him: “I’m going to see what’s there.”

““So’m I,” he answered. He was pretty white, but he had heaps of pluck. I told him to wait one instant and I made a dash into my bedroom and got my camera and flashlight. I slipped my revolver into my right-hand pocket

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and a knuckle-duster over my left fist, where it was ready and yet would not stop me from being able to work my flashlight.

'Then I ran back to Beaumont. He held out his hand to show me that he had his pistol and I nodded, but whispered to him not to be too quick to shoot, as there might be some silly practical joking at work, after all. He had got a lamp from a bracket in the upper hall which he was holding in the crook of his damaged arm, so that we had a good light. Then we went down the passage towards the billiard room and you can imagine that we were a pretty nervous couple.

'All this time there had not been a sound, but abruptly when we were within perhaps a couple of yards of the door we heard the sudden clumping of a hoof on the solid parquet floor of the billiard room. In the instant afterward it seemed to me that the whole place shook beneath the ponderous hoof falls of some huge thing, *coming towards the door*. Both Beaumont and I gave back a pace or two, and then realized and hung on to our courage, as you might say, and waited. The great tread came right up to the door and then stopped and there was an instant of absolute silence, except that so far as I was concerned, the pulsing in my throat and temples almost deafened me.

'I dare say we waited quite half a minute and then came the further restless clumping of a great hoof. Immediately afterward the sounds came right on as if some invisible thing passed through the closed door and the ponderous tread was upon us. We jumped, each of us, to our side of the passage and I know that I spread myself stiff against the wall. The clungk clunk, clungk clunk, of the great hoof falls passed right between us and slowly and with deadly deliberateness, down the passage. I heard them through a haze of blood-beats in my ears and temples and my body was extraordinarily rigid and pringling and I was horribly breathless. I stood for a little time like this, my

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head turned so that I could see up the passage. I was conscious only that there was a hideous danger abroad. Do you understand?

'And then, suddenly, my pluck came back to me. I was aware that the noise of the hoof-beats sounded near the other end of the passage. I twisted quickly and got my camera to bear and snapped off the flashlight. Immediately afterward, Beaumont let fly a storm of shots down the passage and began to run, shouting: "It's after Mary. Run! Run!"

'He rushed down the passage and I after him. We came out on the main landing and heard the sound of a hoof on the stairs and after that, nothing. And from thence onward, nothing.

'Down below us in the big hall I could see a number of the household round Miss Hisgins, who seemed to have fainted and there were several of the servants clumped together a little way off, staring up at the main landing and no one saying a single word. And about some twenty steps up the stairs was the old Captain Hisgins with a drawn sword in his hand where he had halted, just below the last hoof-sound. I think I never saw anything finer than the old man standing there between his daughter and that infernal thing.

'I daresay you can understand the queer feeling of horror I had at passing that place on the stairs where the sounds had ceased. It was as if the monster were still standing there, invisible. And the peculiar thing was that we never heard another sound of the hoof, either up or down the stairs.

'After they had taken Miss Hisgins to her room I sent word that I should follow, so soon as they were ready for me. And presently, when a message came to tell me that I could come any time, I asked her father to give me a hand with my instrument box and between us we carried it into

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the girl's bedroom. I had the bed pulled well out into the middle of the room, after which I erected the electric pentacle round the bed.

'Then I directed that lamps should be placed round the room, but that on no account must any light be made within the pentacle; neither must anyone pass in or out. The girl's mother I had placed within the pentacle and directed that her maid should sit without, ready to carry any message so as to make sure that Mrs Hisgins did not have to leave the pentacle. I suggested also that the girl's father should stay the night in the room and that he had better be armed.

'When I left the bedroom I found Beaumont waiting outside the door in a miserable state of anxiety. I told him what I had done and explained to him that Miss Hisgins was probably perfectly safe within the "protection"; but that in addition to her father remaining the night in the room, I intended to stand guard at the door. I told him that I should like him to keep me company, for I knew that he could never sleep, feeling as he did, and I should not be sorry to have a companion. Also, I wanted to have him under my own observation, for there was no doubt but that he was actually in greater danger in some ways than the girl. At least, that was my opinion and is still, as I think you will agree later.

'I asked him whether he would object to my drawing a pentacle round him for the night and got him to agree, but I saw that he did not know whether to be superstitious about it or to regard it more as a piece of foolish mumming; but he took it seriously enough when I gave him some particulars about the Black Veil case, when young Aster died. You remember, he said it was a piece of silly superstition and stayed outside. Poor devil!

'The night passed quietly enough until a little while before dawn when we both heard the sounds of a great

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horse galloping round and round the house, just as old Captain Hisgins had described it. You can imagine how queer it made me feel and directly afterward, I heard someone stir within the bedroom. I knocked at the door, for I was uneasy, and the Captain came. I asked whether everything was right; to which he replied yes, and immediately asked me whether I had heard the sounds of the galloping, so that I knew he had heard them also. I suggested that it might be well to leave the bedroom door open a little until the dawn came in, as there was certainly something abroad. This was done and he went back into the room, to be near his wife and daughter.

‘I had better say here that I was doubtful whether there was any value in the “Defense” about Miss Hisgins, for what I term the “personal-sounds” of the manifestation were so extraordinarily material that I was inclined to parallel the case with that one of Harford’s where the hand of the child kept materialising within the pentacle and patting the floor. As you will remember, that was a hideous business.

‘Yet, as it chanced, nothing further happened and so soon as daylight had fully come we all went off to bed.

‘Beaumont knocked me up about midday and I went down and made breakfast into lunch. Miss Hisgins was there and seemed in very fair spirits, considering. She told me that I had made her feel almost safe for the first time for days. She told me also that her cousin, Harry Parsket, was coming down from London and she knew that he would do anything to help fight the ghost. And after that she and Beaumont went out into the grounds to have a little time together.

‘I had a walk in the grounds myself and went round the house, but saw no traces of hoof-marks and after that I spent the rest of the day making an examination of the house, but found nothing.

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‘I made an end of my search before dark and went to my room to dress for dinner. When I got down the cousin had just arrived and I found him one of the nicest men I have met for a long time. A chap with a tremendous amount of pluck, and the particular kind of man I like to have with me in a bad case like the one I was on.

‘I could see that what puzzled him most was our belief in the genuineness of the haunting and I found myself almost wanting something to happen, just to show him how true it was. As it chanced, something did happen, with a vengeance.

‘Beaumont and Miss Hisgins had gone out for a stroll just before the dusk and Captain Hisgins asked me to come into his study for a short chat whilst Parsket went upstairs with his traps, for he had no man with him.

‘I had a long conversation with the old Captain in which I pointed out that the “haunting” had evidently no particular connection with the house, but only with the girl herself and that the sooner she was married, the better, as it would give Beaumont a right to be with her at all times and further than this, it might be that the manifestations would cease if the marriage were actually performed.

‘The old man nodded agreement to this, especially to the first part and reminded me that three of the girls who were said to have been “haunted” had been sent away from home and met their deaths whilst away. And then in the midst of our talk there came a pretty frightening interruption, for all at once the old butler rushed into the room, most extraordinarily pale:

“Miss Mary, sir! Miss Mary, sir!” he gasped. “She’s screaming . . . out in the Park, sir! And they say they can hear the Horse——”

‘The Captain made one dive for a rack of arms and snatched down his old sword and ran out, drawing it as he

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ran. I dashed out and up the stairs, snatched my camera-flashlight and a heavy revolver, gave one yell at Parsket's door: "The Horse!" and was down and into the grounds.

'Away in the darkness there was a confused shouting and I caught the sounds of shooting, out among the scattered trees. And then, from a patch of blackness to my left, there burst suddenly an infernal gobbling sort of neighing. Instantly I whipped round and snapped off the flashlight. The great light blazed out momentarily, showing me the leaves of a big tree close at hand, quivering in the night breeze, but I saw nothing else and then the ten-fold blackness came down upon me and I heard Parsket shouting a little way back to know whether I had seen anything.

'The next instant he was beside me and I felt safer for his company, for there was some incredible thing near to us and I was momentarily blind because of the brightness of the flashlight. "What was it? What was it?" he kept repeating in an excited voice. And all the time I was staring into the darkness and answering, mechanically, "I don't know. I don't know."

'There was a burst of shouting somewhere ahead and then a shot. We ran towards the sounds, yelling to the people not to shoot; for in the darkness and panic there was this danger also. Then there came two of the game-keepers, racing hard up the drive with their lanterns and guns; and immediately afterward a row of lights dancing towards us from the house, carried by some of the men-servants.

'As the lights came up I saw we had come close to Beaumont. He was standing over Miss Higsins and he had his revolver in his hand. Then I saw his face and there was a great wound across his forehead. By him was the Captain, turning his naked sword this way and that, and peering into the darkness; a little behind him stood the old butler, a battle-axe from one of the arm-stands in the hall in his hands. Yet there was nothing strange to be seen anywhere.

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‘We got the girl into the house and left her with her mother and Beaumont, whilst a groom rode for a doctor. And then the rest of us, with four other keepers, all armed with guns and carrying lanterns, searched round the home-park. But we found nothing.

‘When we got back we found that the doctor had been. He had bound up Beaumont’s wound, which luckily was not deep, and ordered Miss Hisgins straight to bed. I went upstairs with the Captain and found Beaumont on guard outside of the girl’s door. I asked him how he felt and then, so soon as the girl and her mother were ready for us, Captain Hisgins and I went into the bedroom and fixed the pentacle again round the bed. They had already got lamps about the room and after I had set the same order of watching as on the previous night, I joined Beaumont outside of the door.

‘Parsket had come up while I had been in the bedroom and between us we got some idea from Beaumont as to what had happened out in the Park. It seems that they were coming home after their stroll from the direction of the West Lodge. It had got quite dark and suddenly Miss Hisgins said: “Hush!” and came to a standstill. He stopped and listened, but heard nothing for a little. Then he caught it—the sound of a horse, seemingly a long way off, galloping towards them over the grass. He told the girl that it was nothing and started to hurry her towards the house, but she was not deceived, of course. In less than a minute they heard it quite close to them in the darkness and they started running. Then Miss Hisgins caught her foot and fell. She began to scream and that is what the butler heard. As Beaumont lifted the girl he heard the hoofs come thudding right at him. He stood over her and fired all five chambers of his revolver right at the sounds. He told us that he was sure he saw something that looked like an enormous horse’s head, right upon him in the light

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of the last flash of his pistol. Immediately afterwards he was struck a tremendous blow which knocked him down and then the Captain and the butler came running up, shouting. The rest, of course, we knew.

‘About ten o’clock the butler brought us up a tray, for which I was very glad, as the night before I had got rather hungry. I warned Beaumont, however, to be very particular not to drink any spirits and I also made him give me his pipe and matches. At midnight I drew a pentacle round him and Parsket and I sat one on each side of him, but outside the pentacle, for I had no fear that there would be any manifestation made against anyone except Beaumont or Miss Hisgins.

‘After that we kept pretty quiet: The passage was lit by a big lamp at each end so that we had plenty of light and we were all armed, Beaumont and I with revolvers and Parsket with a shot-gun. In addition to my weapon I had my camera and flashlight.

‘Now and again we talked in whispers and twice the Captain came out of the bedroom to have a word with us. About half past one we had all grown very silent and suddenly, about twenty minutes later, I held up my hand, silently; for there seemed to be a sound of galloping out in the night. I knocked on the bedroom door for the Captain to open it and when he came I whispered to him that we thought we heard the Horse. For some time we stayed, listening, and both Parsket and the Captain thought they heard it; but now I was not so sure, neither was Beaumont. Yet afterwards, I thought I heard it again.

‘I told Captain Hisgins I thought he had better go back into the bedroom and leave the door a little open and this he did. But from that time onward we heard nothing and presently the dawn came in and we all went very thankfully to bed.

‘When I was called at lunch-time I had a little surprise,

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for Captain Hisgins told me that they had held a family council and had decided to take my advice and have the marriage without a day's more delay than possible. Beaumont was already on his way to London to get a special License and they hoped to have the wedding next day.

'This pleased me, for it seemed the sanest thing to be done in the extraordinary circumstances and meanwhile I should continue my investigations; but until the marriage was accomplished, my chief thought was to keep Miss Hisgins near to me.

'After lunch I thought I would take a few experimental photographs of Miss Hisgins and her *surroundings*. Sometimes the camera sees things that would seem very strange to normal human eyesight.

'With this intention and partly to make an excuse to keep her in my company as much as possible, I asked Miss Hisgins to join me in my experiments. She seemed glad to do this and I spent several hours with her, wandering all over the house, from room to room and whenever the impulse came I took a flashlight of her and the room or corridor in which we chanced to be at the moment.

After we had gone right through the house in this fashion, I asked her whether she felt sufficiently brave to repeat the experiments in the cellars. She said yes, and so I rooted out Captain Hisgins and Parsket, for I was not going to take her even into what you might call artificial darkness without help and companionship at hand.

'When we were ready we went down into the wine cellar, Captain Hisgins carrying a shot-gun and Parsket a specially prepared background and a lantern. I got the girl to stand in the middle of the cellar whilst Parsket and the Captain held out the background behind her. Then I fired off the flashlight, and we went into the next cellar where we repeated the experiment.

'Then in the third cellar, a tremendous, pitch-dark

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place, something extraordinary and horrible manifested itself. I had stationed Miss Hisgins in the centre of the place, with her father and Parsket holding the background, as before. When all was ready and just as I pressed the trigger of the "flash", there came in the cellar that dreadful, gobbling neighing that I had heard out in the Park. It seemed to come from somewhere above the girl and in the glare of the sudden light I saw that she was staring tensely upward, but at no visible thing. And then in the succeeding comparative darkness, I was shouting to the Captain and Parsket to run Miss Hisgins out into the daylight.

'This was done instantly and I shut and locked the door afterwards making the First and Eighth signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual opposite to each post and connecting them across the threshold with a triple line.

'In the meanwhile Parsket and Captain Hisgins carried the girl to her mother and left her there, in a half-fainting condition whilst I stayed on guard outside of the cellar door, feeling pretty horrible for I knew that there was some disgusting thing inside, and along with this feeling there was a sense of half-ashamedness, rather miserable, you know, because I had exposed Miss Hisgins to the danger.

'I had got the Captain's shot-gun and when he and Parsket came down again they were each carrying guns and lanterns. I could not possibly tell you the utter relief of spirit and body that came to me when I heard them coming, but just try to imagine what it was like, standing outside of that cellar. Can you?

'I remember noticing, just before I went to unlock the door, how white and ghastly Parsket looked and the old Captain was grey-looking and I wondered whether my face was like theirs. And this, you know, had its own distinct effect upon my nerves, for it seemed to bring the beastliness

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of the thing bash down on to me in a fresh way. I know it was only sheer will power that carried me up to the door and made me turn the key.

'I paused one little moment and then with a nervy jerk sent the door wide open and held my lantern over my head. Parsket and the Captain came one on each side of me and held up their lanterns, but the place was absolutely empty. Of course, I did not trust to a casual look of this kind, but spent several hours with the help of the two others in sounding every square foot of the floor, ceiling and walls.

'Yet, in the end I had to admit that the place itself was absolutely normal and so we came away. But I sealed the door and outside, opposite each door-post I made the First and Last signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual, joined them as before, with a triple line. Can you imagine what it was like, searching that cellar?

'When we got upstairs I inquired very anxiously how Miss Hisgins was and the girl came out herself to tell me that she was all right and that I was not to trouble about her, or blame myself, as I told her I had been doing.

'I felt happier then and went off to dress for dinner and after that was done, Parsket and I took one of the bathrooms to develop the negatives that I had been taking. Yet none of the plates had anything to tell us until we came to the one that was taken in the cellar. Parsket was developing and I had taken a batch of the fixed plates out into the lamplight to examine them.

'I had just gone carefully through the lot when I heard a shout from Parsket and when I ran to him he was looking at a partly-developed negative which he was holding up to the red lamp. It showed the girl plainly, looking upward as I had seen her, but the thing that astonished me was the shadow of an enormous hoof, right above her, as if it were coming down upon her out of the shadows. And you know,

much not to know that under such circumstances a pre-monitory *conviction* of impending danger is not necessarily to be put down entirely to nerves. In fact, Beaumont was so simply and earnestly convinced that the night would bring some extraordinary manifestation that I got Parsket to rig up a long cord from the wire of the butler's bell, to come along the passage handy.

'To the butler himself I gave directions not to undress and to give the same order to two of the footmen. If I rang lanterns and the lanterns were to be kept ready lit all night. If for any reason the bell did not ring and I blew my whistle, he was to take that as a signal in the place of the bell.

'After I had arranged all these minor details I drew a pentacle about Beaumont and warned him very particularly to stay within it, whatever happened. And when this was done, there was nothing to do but wait and pray that the night would go as quietly as the night before.

'We scarcely talked at all and by about one a.m. we were all very tense and nervous so that at last Parsket got up and began to walk up and down the corridor to steady himself a bit. Presently I slipped off my pumps and joined him and we walked up and down, whispering occasionally for something over an hour, until in turning I caught my foot in the bell-cord and went down on my face; but without hurting myself or making a noise.

'When I got up Parsket nudged me.

'"Did you notice that the bell never rang?" he whispered.

'"Jove!" I said, "you're right."

'"Wait a minute," he answered, "I'll bet it's only a

kink somewhere in the cord." He left his gun and slipped along the passage and taking the top lamp, tiptoed away into the house, carrying Beaumont's revolver ready in his

right hand. He was a plucky chap, I remember thinking then, and again, later.

'Just then Beaumont motioned to me for absolute quiet.—the sound of a horse galloping, out in the night. I think that I may say I fairly shivered. The sound died away and left a horrible, desolate, eerie feeling in the air, you know. I put my hand out to the bell-cord, hoping that Parsket had got it clear. Then I waited, glancing before and behind.

'Perhaps two minutes passed, full of what seemed like an almost unearthly quiet. And then, suddenly, down the corridor at the lighted end there sounded the clumping of a great hoof and instantly the lamp was thrown down with a tremendous crash and we were in the dark. I tugged hard on the cord and blew the whistle; then I raised my snapshot and fired the flashlight. The corridor blazed into brilliant light, but there was nothing, and then the darkness fell like thunder. I heard the Captain at the bedroom-door and shouted to him to bring out a lamp, *quick*; but instead something started to kick the door and I heard the Captain shouting within the bedroom and then the screaming of the women. I had a sudden horrible fear that the monster had got into the bedroom, but in the same instant from up the corridor there came abruptly the vile, goblining neighing that we had heard in the park and the cellar. I blew the whistle again and groped blindly for the bell-cord, shouting to Beaumont to stay in the Pentacle, whatever happened. I yelled again to the Captain to bring out a lamp and there came a smashing sound against the bedroom door. Then I had my matches in my hand, to get some light before that incredible, unseen Monster was upon us.

'The match scraped on the box and flared up dully and in the same instant I heard a faint sound behind me. I whipped round in a kind of mad terror and saw something

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in the light of the match—a monstrous horse-head close to Beaumont.

“Look out, Beaumont!” I shouted in a sort of scream. “It’s behind you!”

‘The match went out abruptly and instantly there came the huge bang of Parsket’s double-barrel (both barrels at once), fired evidently single-handed by Beaumont close to my ear, as it seemed. I caught a momentary glimpse of the great head in the flash and of an enormous hoof amid the belch of fire and smoke seeming to be descending upon Beaumont. In the same instant I fired three chambers of my revolver. There was the sound of a dull blow and then that horrible, gobbling neigh broke out close to me. I fired twice at the sound. Immediately afterward something struck me and I was knocked backwards. I got on to my knees and shouted for help at the top of my voice. I heard the women screaming behind the closed door of the bedroom and was dully aware that the door was being smashed from the inside, and directly afterwards I knew that Beaumont was struggling with some hideous thing near to me. For an instant I held back, stupidly, paralysed with funk and then, blindly and in a sort of rigid chill of goose-flesh I went to help him, shouting his name. I can tell you, I was nearly sick with the naked fear I had on me. There came a little, choking scream out of the darkness, and at that I jumped forward into the dark. I gripped a vast, furry ear. Then something struck me another great blow, knocking me sick. I hit back, weak and blind and gripped with my other hand at the incredible thing. Abruptly I was dimly aware of a tremendous crash behind me and a great burst of light. There were other lights in the passage and a noise of feet and shouting. My hand-grips were torn from the thing they held; I shut my eyes stupidly and heard a loud yell above me and then a heavy blow, like a butcher chopping meat and then something fell upon me.

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'I was helped to my knees by the Captain and the butler. On the floor lay an enormous horse-head out of which protruded a man's trunk and legs. On the wrists were fixed great hoofs. It was the monster. The Captain cut something with the sword that he held in his hand and stooped and lifted off the mask, for that is what it was. I saw the face then of the man who had worn it. It was Parsket. He had a bad wound across the forehead where the Captain's sword had bit through the mask. I looked bewilderedly from him to Beaumont, who was sitting up, leaning against the wall of the corridor. Then I stared at Parsket again.

"By Jove!" I said at last, and then I was quiet for I was so ashamed for the man. You can understand, can't you? And he was opening his eyes. And you know, I had grown so to like him.

'And then, you know, just as Parsket was getting back his wits and looking from one to the other of us and beginning to remember, there happened a strange and incredible thing. For from the end of the corridor there sounded, suddenly, the clumping of a great hoof. I looked that way and then instantly at Parsket and saw a horrible fear in his face and eyes. He wrenched himself round, weakly, and stared in mad terror up the corridor to where the sound had been, and the rest of us stared, in a frozen group. I remember vaguely half sobs and whispers from Miss Hisgins' bedroom, all the while that I stared frightenedly up the corridor.

'The silence lasted several seconds and then, abruptly, there came again the clumping of the great hoof, away at the end of the corridor. And immediately afterward the clungk, clunk—clungk, clunk of mighty hoofs coming down the passage towards us.

'Even then, you know, most of us thought it was some mechanism of Parsket's still at work and we were in the queerest mixture of fright and doubt. I think everyone

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looked at Parsket. And suddenly the Captain shouted out:

“Stop this damned fooling at once. Haven’t you done enough?”

‘For my part, I was now frightened for I had a *sense* that there was something horrible and wrong. And then Parsket managed to gasp out:

“It’s not me! My God! It’s not me! My God! It’s not me.”

‘And then, you know, it seemed to come home to everyone in an instant that there was really some dreadful thing coming down the passage. There was a mad rush to get away and even old Captain Hisgins gave back with the butler and the footmen. Beaumont fainted outright, as I found afterwards, for he had been badly mauled. I just flattened back against the wall, kneeling as I was, too stupid and dazed even to run. And almost in the same instant the ponderous hoof-falls sounded close to me and seeming to shake the solid floor as they passed. Abruptly the great sounds ceased and I knew in a sort of sick fashion that the thing had halted opposite to the door of the girl’s bedroom. And then I was aware that Parsket was standing rocking in the doorway with his arms spread across, so as to fill the doorway with his body. Parsket was extraordinarily pale and the blood was running down his face from the wound in his forehead; and then I noticed that he seemed to be looking at something in the passage with a peculiar, desperate, fixed, incredibly masterful gaze. But there was really nothing to be seen. And suddenly the clungk, clunk—clungk, clunk recommenced and passed onward down the passage. In the same moment Parsket pitched forward out of the doorway on to his face.

‘There were shouts from the huddle of men down the passage and the two footmen and the butler simply ran,

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carrying their lanterns, but the Captain went against the side-wall with his back and put the lamp he was carrying over his head. The dull tread of the Horse went past him, and left him unharmed and I heard the monstrous hoof-falls going away and away through the quiet house and after that a dead silence.

‘Then the Captain moved and came towards us, very slow and shaky and with an extraordinarily grey face.

‘I crept towards Parsket and the Captain came to help me. We turned him over and, you know, I knew in a moment that he was dead; but you can imagine what a feeling it sent through me.

‘I looked at the Captain and suddenly he said:

“‘That—That—That—” and I know that he was trying to tell me that Parsket had stood between his daughter and whatever it was that had gone down the passage. I stood up and steadied him, though I was not very steady myself. And suddenly his face began to work and he went down on to his knees by Parsket and cried like some shaken child. Then the women came out of the doorway of the bedroom and I turned away and left him to them, whilst I went over to Beaumont.

‘That is practically the whole story and the only thing that is left to me is to try to explain some of the puzzling parts, here and there.

‘Perhaps you have seen that Parsket was in love with Miss Hisgins and this fact is the key to a good deal that was extraordinary. He was doubtless responsible for some portions of the “haunting”; in fact I think for nearly everything, but, you know, I can prove nothing and what I have to tell you is chiefly the result of deduction.

‘In the first place, it is obvious that Parsket’s intention was to frighten Beaumont away and when he found that he could not do this, I think he grew so desperate that he

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really intended to kill him. I hate to say this, but the facts force me to think so.

‘I am quite certain that it was Parsket who broke Beaumont’s arm. He knew all the details of the so-called “Horse Legend”, and got the idea to work upon the old story for his own end. He evidently had some method of slipping in and out of the house, probably through one of the many French windows, or possibly he had a key to one or two of the garden doors, and when he was supposed to be away, he was really coming down on the quiet and hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood.

‘The incident of the kiss in the dark hall I put down to sheer nervous imaginings on the part of Beaumont and Miss Hisgins, yet I must say that the sound of the horse outside of the front door is a little difficult to explain away. But I am still inclined to keep to my first idea on this point, that there was nothing really unnatural about it.

‘The hoof-sounds in the billiard-room and down the passage were done by Parsket from the floor below by bumping up against the panelled ceiling with a block of wood tied to one of the window-hooks. I proved this by an examination which showed the dents in the wood-work.

‘The sounds of the horse galloping round the house were possibly made also by Parsket, who must have had a horse tied up in the plantation near by, unless, indeed, he made the sounds himself, but I do not see how he could have gone fast enough to produce the illusion. In any case, I don’t feel perfect certainty on this point. I failed to find any hoof marks, as you remember.

‘The gobbling neighing in the park was a ventriloquial achievement on the part of Parsket and the attack out there on Beaumont was also by him, so that when I thought he was in his bedroom, he must have been outside all the time and joined me after I ran out of the front door. This

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is almost probable. I mean that Parsket was the cause, for if it had been something more serious he would certainly have given up his foolishness, knowing that there was no longer any need for it. I cannot imagine how he escaped being shot, both then and in the last mad action of which I have just told you. He was enormously without fear of any kind for himself as you can see.

‘The time when Parsket was with us, when we thought we heard the Horse galloping round the house, we must have been deceived. No one was very sure, except, of course, Parsket, who would naturally encourage the belief.

‘The neighing in the cellar is where I consider there came the first suspicion into Parsket’s mind that there was something more at work than his sham-haunting. The neighing was done by him in the same way that he did it in the park; but when I remember how ghastly he looked, I feel sure that the sounds must have had some infernal quality added to them which frightened the man himself. Yet, later, he would persuade himself that he had been getting fanciful. Of course, I must not forget that the effect upon Miss Hisgins must have made him feel pretty miserable.

‘Then, about the clergyman being called away, we found afterwards that it was a bogus errand, or, rather, call and it is apparent that Parsket was at the bottom of this, so as to get a few more hours in which to achieve his end and what that was, a very little imagination will show you; for he had found that Beaumont would not be frightened away. I hate to think this, but I’m bound to. Anyway, it is obvious that the man was temporarily a bit off his normal balance. Love’s a queer disease!

‘Then, there is no doubt at all but that Parsket left the cord to the butler’s bell hitched somewhere so as to give him an excuse to slip away naturally to clear it. This also gave him the opportunity to remove one of the passage

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lamps. Then he had only to smash the other and the passage was in utter darkness for him to make the attempt on Beaumont.

‘In the same way, it was he who locked the door of the bedroom and took the key (it was in his pocket). This prevented the Captain from bringing a light and coming to the rescue. But Captain Hisgins broke down the door with the heavy fender-curb and it was his smashing the door that sounded so confusing and frightening in the darkness of the passage.

‘The photograph of the monstrous hoof above Miss Hisgins in the cellar is one of the things that I am less sure about. It might have been faked by Parsket, whilst I was out of the room, and this would have been easy enough, to anyone who knew how. But, you know, it does not look like a fake. Yet, there is as much evidence of probability that it was faked, as against; and the thing is too vague for an examination to help to a definite decision so that I will express no opinion, one way or the other. It is certainly a horrible photograph.

‘And now I come to that last, dreadful thing. There has been no further manifestation of anything abnormal, so that there is an extraordinary uncertainty in my conclusions. If we had not heard those last sounds and if Parsket had not shown that enormous sense of fear, the whole of this case could be explained in the way in which I have shown. And, in fact, as you have seen, I am of the opinion that almost all of it can be cleared up, but I see no way of going past the thing we heard at the last and the fear that Parsket showed.

‘His death—no, that proves nothing. At the inquest it was described somewhat untechnically as due to heart-spasm. That is normal enough and leaves us quite in the dark as to whether he died because he stood between the girl and some incredible thing of monstrosity.

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'The look on Parsket's face and the thing he called out when he heard the great hoof-sounds coming down the passage seem to show that he had the sudden realization of what before then may have been nothing more than a horrible suspicion. And his fear and appreciation of some tremendous danger approaching was probably more keenly real even than mine. And then he did the one fine, great thing!'

'And the cause?' I said. 'What caused it?'

Carnacki shook his head.

'God knows,' he answered, with a peculiar, sincere reverence. 'If that thing was what it seemed to be one might suggest an explanation which would not offend one's reason, but which may be utterly wrong. Yet I have thought, though it would take a long lecture on Thought Induction to get you to appreciate my reasons, that Parsket had produced what I might term a kind of "induced haunting", a kind of induced simulation of his mental conceptions due to his desperate thoughts and broodings. It is impossible to make it clearer in a few words.'

'But the old story!' I said. 'Why may not there have been something in *that*?'

'There may have been something in it,' said Carnacki. 'But I do not think it had anything to do with *this*. I have not clearly thought out my reasons, yet; but later I may be able to tell you why I think so.'

'And the marriage? And the cellar—was there anything found there?' asked Taylor.

'Yes, the marriage was performed that day in spite of the tragedy,' Carnacki told us. 'It was the wisest thing to do—considering the things that I cannot explain. Yes, I had the floor of that big cellar up, for I had a feeling I might find something there to give me some light. But there was nothing.'

'You know, the whole thing is tremendous and

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extraordinary. I shall never forget the look on Parsket's face. And afterwards the disgusting sounds of those great hoofs going away through the quiet house.'

Carnacki stood up:

'Out you go!' he said in friendly fashion, using the recognized formula.

And we went presently out into the quiet of the Embankment, and so to our homes.

XIII

The Game Played in the Dark

Ernest Bramah

‘It’s a funny thing, sir,’ said Inspector Beedel, regarding Mr Carrados with the pensive respect that he always extended towards the blind amateur, ‘it’s a funny thing, but nothing seems to go on abroad now but what you’ll find some trace of it here in London if you take the trouble to look.’

‘In the right quarter,’ contributed Carrados.

‘Why, yes,’ agreed the inspector. ‘But nothing comes of it nine times out of ten, because it’s no one’s particular business to look here or the thing’s been taken up and finished from the other end. I don’t mean ordinary murders or single-handed burglaries, of course, but—’ a modest ring of professional pride betrayed the quiet enthusiast—‘real First-Class Crimes.’

‘The State Antonio Five per cent. Bond Coupons?’ suggested Carrados.

‘Ah, you are right, Mr Carrados.’ Beedel shook his head sadly, as though perhaps on that occasion someone ought to have looked. ‘A man has a fit in the inquiry office of the Agent-General for British Equatoria, and two hundred and fifty thousand pounds’ worth of faked securities is the

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result in Mexico. Then look at that jade fylfot charm pawned for one-and-three down at the Basin and the use that could have been made of it in the Kharkov "ritual murder" trial.'

'The West Hampstead Lost Memory puzzle and the Baripur bomb conspiracy that might have been smothered if one had known.'

'Quite true, sir. And the three children of that Chicago millionaire—Cyrus V. Bunting, wasn't it?—kidnapped in broad daylight outside the New York Lyric and here, three weeks later, the dumb girl who chalked the wall at Charing Cross. I remember reading once in a financial article that every piece of foreign gold had a string from it leading to Threadneedle Street. A figure of speech, sir, of course, but apt enough, I don't doubt. Well, it seems to me that every big crime done abroad leaves a finger-print here in London—if only, as you say, we look in the right quarter.'

'And at the right moment,' added Carrados. 'The time is often the present; the place the spot beneath our very noses. We take a step and the chance has gone forever.'

The inspector nodded and contributed a weighty monosyllable of sympathetic agreement. The most prosaic of men in the pursuit of his ordinary duties, it nevertheless subtly appealed to some half-dormant streak of vanity to have his profession taken romantically when there was no serious work on hand.

'No; perhaps not "for ever" in one case in a thousand, after all,' amended the blind man thoughtfully. 'This perpetual duel between the Law and the Criminal has sometimes appeared to me in the terms of a game of cricket, inspector. Law is in the field; the Criminal at the wicket. If Law makes a mistake—sends down a loose ball or drops a catch—the Criminal scores a little or has another lease of life. But if *he* makes a mistake—if he lets a straight ball pass or spoons towards a steady man—he is done for. His

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mistakes are fatal; those of the Law are only temporary and retrievable.'

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Beedel, rising—the conversation had taken place in the study at The Turrets, where Beedel had found occasion to present himself—'very apt indeed. I must remember that. Well, sir, I only hope that this "Guido the Razor" lot will send a catch in our direction.'

The "this" delicately marked Inspector Beedel's instinctive contempt for Guido. As a craftsman he was compelled, on his reputation, to respect him, and he had accordingly availed himself of Carrados's friendship for a confabulation. As a man—he was a foreigner: worse, an Italian, and if left to his own resources the inspector would have opposed to his sinuous flexibility, those rigid, essentially Britannia-metal, methods of the force that strike the impartial observer as so ponderous, so amateurish and conventional, and, it must be admitted, often so curiously and inexplicably successful.

The offence that had circuitously brought 'il Rasojo' and his 'lot' within the cognizance of Scotland Yard outlines the kind of story that is discreetly hinted at by the society paragraphist of the day, politely disbelieved by the astute reader, and then at last laid indiscreetly bare in all its details by the inevitable princessly 'Recollections' of a generation later. It centred round an impending royal marriage in Vienna, a certain jealous 'Countess X' (here you have the discretion of the paragrapher), and a document or two that might be relied upon (the aristocratic biographer will impartially sum up the contingencies) to play the deuce with the approaching nuptials. To procure the evidence of these papers the Countess enlisted the services of Guido, as reliable a scoundrel as she could probably have selected for the commission. To a certain point—to the abstraction of the papers, in fact—he succeeded, but it was with pursuit close upon his heels. There

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was that disadvantage in employing a rogue to do work that implicated roguery, for whatever moral right the Countess had to the property, her accomplice had no legal right whatever to his liberty. On half-a-dozen charges at least he could be arrested on sight in as many capitals of Europe. He slipped out of Vienna by the Nordbahn with his destination known, resourcefully stopped the express outside Czaslau and got away across to Chrudim. By this time the game and the moves were pretty well understood in more than one keenly interested quarter. Diplomacy supplemented justice and the immediate history of Guido became that of a fox hunted from covert to covert with all the familiar earths stopped against him. From Pardubitz he passed on to Glatz, reached Breslau and went down the Oder to Stettin. Out of the liberality of his employer's advances he had ample funds to keep going, and he dropped and rejoined his accomplices as the occasion ruled. A week's harrying found him in Copenhagen, still with no time to spare, and he missed his purpose there. He crossed to Malmö by ferry, took the connecting night train to Stockholm and the same morning sailed down the Saltsjon, ostensibly bound for Obo, intending to cross to Reval and so get back to central Europe by the less frequented routes. But in this move again luck was against him and receiving warning just in time, and by the mysterious agency that had so far protected him, he contrived to be dropped from the steamer by boat among the islands of the crowded Archipelago, made his way to Helsingfors and within forty-eight hours was back again on the Frihaven with pursuit for the moment blinked and a breathing-time to the good. To appreciate the exact significance of these wanderings it is necessary to recall the conditions. Guido was not zig-zagging a course about Europe in an aimless search for the picturesque, still less inspired by any love of the melodramatic. To him every step was vital, each tangent

rebound the necessary outcome of his much-badgered plans. In his pocket reposed the papers for which he had run grave risks. The price agreed upon for the service was sufficiently lavish to make the risks worth taking time after time; but in order to communicate the transaction it was necessary that the booty should be put into his employer's hand. Half-way across Europe that employer was waiting with such patience as she could maintain, herself watched and shadowed at every step. The Countess X was sufficiently exalted to be personally immune from the high-handed methods of her country's secret service, but every approach to her was tapped. The problem was for Guido to earn a long enough respite to enable him to communicate his position to the Countess and for her to go or to reach him by a trusty hand. Then the whole fabric of intrigue could fall to pieces, but so far Guido had been kept successfully on the run and in the meanwhile time was pressing.

'They lost him after the Hutola,' Beedel reported, in explaining the circumstances to Max Carrados. 'Three days later they found that he'd been back again in Copenhagen but by that time he'd flown. Now they're without a trace except the inference of these "Orange peach blossom" agonies in *The Times*. But the Countess has gone hurriedly to Paris; and Lafayard thinks it all points to London.'

'I suppose the Foreign Office is anxious to oblige just now?'

'I expect so, sir,' agreed Beedel, 'but, of course, my instructions don't come from that quarter. What appeals to us is that it would be a feather in our caps—they're still a little sore up at the Yard about Hans the Piper.'

'Naturally,' assented Carrados. 'Well, I'll see what I can do if there is real occasion. Let me know anything, and, if you see your chance yourself, come round for a talk if you like on—today's Wednesday?—I shall be in at any rate on Friday evening.'

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Without being a precisian, the blind man was usually exact in such matters. There are those who hold that an engagement must be kept at all hazard; men who would miss a death-bed message in order to keep literal faith with a beggar. Carrados took lower, if more substantial ground. 'My word,' he sometimes had occasion to remark, 'is subject to contingencies, like everything else about me. If I make a promise it is conditional on nothing which seems more important arising to counteract it. That, among men of sense, is understood.' And, as it happened, something did occur on this occasion.

He was summoned to the telephone just before dinner on Friday evening to receive a message personally. Greatorrex, his secretary, had taken the call, but came in to say that the caller would give him nothing beyond his name—Brebner. The name was unknown to Carrados, but such incidents were not uncommon, and he proceeded to comply.

'Yes,' he responded; 'I am Max Carrados speaking. What is it?'

'Oh, it is you, sir, is it? Mr Brickwell told me to get to you direct.'

'Well, you are all right. Brickwell? Are you the British Museum?'

'Yes. I am Brebner in the Chaldean Art Department. They are in a great stew here. We have just found out that someone has managed to get access to the second Inner Greek Room and looted some of the cabinets there. It is all a mystery as yet.'

'What is missing?' asked Carrados.

'So far we can only definitely speak of about six trays of Greek coins—a hundred to a hundred and twenty, roughly.'

'Important?'

The line conveyed a caustic bark of tragic amusement.

'Why, yes, I should say so. The beggar seems to have

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known his business. All fine specimens of the best period. Syracuse—Messana—Croton—Amphipolis. Eumenes—Evainetos—Kimons. The chief quite wept.'

Carrados groaned. There was not a piece among them that he had not handled lovingly.

'What are you doing?' he demanded.

'Mr Brickwell has been to Scotland Yard, and, on advice, we are not making it public as yet. We don't want a hint of it dropped anywhere, if you don't mind, sir.'

'That will be all right.'

'It was for that reason that I was to speak with you personally. We are notifying the chief dealers and likely collectors to whom the coins, or some of them, may be offered at once if it is thought that we haven't found it out yet. Judging from the expertness displayed in the selection, we don't think that there is any danger of the lot being sold to a pawnbroker or a metal-dealer, so that we are running very little real risk in not advertising the loss.'

'Yes; probably it is as well,' replied Carrados. 'Is there anything that Mr Brickwell wishes me to do?'

'Only this, sir; if you are offered a suspicious lot of Greek coins, or hear of them, would you have a look—I mean ascertain whether they are likely to be ours, and if you think they are communicate with us and Scotland Yard at once?'

'Certainly,' replied the blind man. 'Tell Mr Brickwell that he can rely on me if any indication comes my way. Convey my regrets to him and tell him that I feel the loss quite as a personal one. . . . I don't think that you and I have met as yet, Mr Brebner?'

'No, sir,' said the voice diffidently, 'but I have looked forward to the pleasure. Perhaps this unfortunate business will bring me an introduction.'

'You are very kind,' was Carrados's acknowledgement of the compliment. 'Any time. . . . I was going to say that

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perhaps you don't know my weakness; but I have spent many pleasant hours over your wonderful collection. That ensures the personal element. Goodbye.'

Carrados was really disturbed by the loss although his concern was tempered by the reflection that the coins would inevitably in the end find their way back to the Museum. That their restitution might involve ransom to the extent of several thousand pounds was the least poignant detail of the situation. The one harrowing thought was that the booty might, through stress or ignorance, find its way into the melting-pot. That dreadful contingency, remote but insistent, was enough to affect the appetite of the blind enthusiast.

He was expecting Inspector Beedel, who would be full of his own case, but he could not altogether dismiss the aspects of possibility that Brebner's communication opened before his mind. He was still concerned with the chances of destruction and a very indifferent companion for Greatorrex, who alone sat with him, when Parkinson presented himself. Dinner was over but Carrados had remained rather longer than his custom, smoking his mild Turkish cigarette in silence.

'A lady wishes to see you, sir. She said you would not know her name, but that her business would interest you.'

The form of message was sufficiently unusual to take the attention of both men.

'You don't know her, of course, Parkinson?' inquired his master.

For just a second the immaculate Parkinson seemed tongue-tied. Then he delivered himself in his most ceremonial strain.

'I regret to say that I cannot claim the advantage, sir,' he replied.

'Better let me tackle her, sir,' suggested Greatorrex with easy confidence. 'It's probably a sub.'

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The sportive offer was declined by a smile and a shake of the head. Carrados turned to his attendant.

'I shall be in the study, Parkinson. Show her there in three minutes. You stay and have another cigarette, Greatorex. By that time she will either have gone or have interested me.'

In three minutes' time Parkinson threw open the study door.

'The lady, sir,' he announced.

Could he have seen, Carrados would have received the impression of a plainly, almost dowdily, dressed young woman of buxom figure. She wore a light veil, but it was ineffective in concealing the unattraction of the face beneath. The features were swart and the upper lip darkened with the more than incipient moustache of the southern brunette. Worse remained, for a disfiguring rash had assailed patches of her skin. As she entered she swept the room and its occupant with a quiet but comprehensive survey.

'Please take a chair, madame. You wished to see me?'

The ghost of a demure smile flickered about her mouth as she complied, and in that moment her face seemed less uncomely. Her eye lingered for a moment on a cabinet above the desk, and one might have noticed that her eye was very bright. Then she replied.

'You are Signor Carrados, in—in the person?'

Carrados made his smiling admission and changed his position a fraction—possibly to catch her curiously pitched voice the better.

'The great collector of the antiquities?'

'I do collect a little,' he admitted guardedly.

'You will forgive me, Signor, if my language is not altogether good. When I live at Naples with my mother we let boardings, chiefly to English and Amerigans. I pick up the words, but since I marry and go to live in Calabria my

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English has gone all red—no, no, you say, rusty. Yes, that's it; quite rusty.'

'It is excellent,' said Carrados. 'I am sure that we shall understand one another perfectly.'

The lady shot a penetrating glance, but the blind man's expression was merely suave and courteous. Then she continued:

'My husband is of name Ferraja—Michele Ferraja. We have a vineyard and a little property near Forenzana.' She paused to examine the tips of her gloves for quite an appreciable moment. 'Signor,' she burst out, with some vehemence, 'the laws of my country are not good at all.'

'From what I hear on all sides,' said Carrados, 'I am afraid that your country is not alone.'

'There is at Forenzana a poor labourer, Gian Verde of name,' continued the visitor, dashing volubly into her narrative, 'He is one day digging in the vineyard, the vineyard of my husband, when his spade strikes itself upon an obstruction. "Aha," says Gian, "what have we here?" and he goes down upon his knees to see. It is an oil jar of red earth, Signor, such as was anciently used, and in it is filled with silver money.'

'Gian is poor but he is wise. Does he call upon the authorities? No, no; he understands that they are all corrupt. He carries what he has found to my husband for he knows him to be a man of great honour.'

'My husband also is of brief decision. His mind is made up. "Gian," he says, "keep your mouth shut. This will be to your ultimate profit." Gian understands, for he can trust my husband. He makes a sign of mutual implication. Then he goes back to the spade digging.'

'My husband understands a little of these things but not enough. We go to the collections of Messina and Naples and even Rome and there we see other pieces of silver money, similar, and learn that they are of great value.'

They are of different sizes but most would cover a lira and of the thickness of two. On the one side imagine the great head of a pagan deity; on the other—oh, so many things I cannot remember what.' A gesture of circumferential despair indicated the hopeless variety of design.

'A biga or quadriga of mules?' suggested Carrados. 'An eagle carrying off a hare, a figure flying with a wreath, a trophy of arms? Some of those perhaps?'

'Si, si bene,' cried Madame Ferraja. 'You understand, I perceive, Signor. We are very cautious, for on every side is extortion and unjust law. See, it is even forbidden to take these things out of the country; yet if we try to dispose of them at home they will be seized and we punished, for they are tesoro trovato, what you call treasure trove and belonging to the State—these coins which the industry of Gian discovered and which had lain for so long in the ground of my husband's vineyard.'

'So you brought them to England?'

'Si, Signor. It is spoken of as a land of justice and rich nobility who buy these things at the highest prices. Also my speaking a little of the language would serve us here.'

'I suppose you have the coins for disposal then? You can show them to me?'

'My husband retains them. I will take you, but you must first give parola d'onore of an English Signor not to betray us, or to speak of the circumstance to another.'

Carrados had already foreseen this eventuality and decided to accept it. Whether a promise exacted on the plea of treasure trove would bind him to respect the despoilers of the British Museum was a point for subsequent consideration. Prudence demanded that he should investigate the offer at once and to cavil over Madame Farraja's conditions would be fatal to that object. If the coins were, as there seemed little reason to doubt, the proceeds of the robbery, a modest ransom might be the

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safest way of preserving irreplaceable treasures, and in that case Carrados could offer his services as the necessary intermediary.

'I give you the promise you require, Madame,' he accordingly declared.

'It is sufficient,' assented Madame. 'I will now take you to the spot. It is necessary that you alone should accompany me, for my husband is so distraught in this country, where he understands not a word of what is spoken, that his poor spirit would cry "We are surrounded!" if he saw two strangers approach the house. Oh, he is become most dreadful in his anxiety, my husband. Imagine only, he keeps on the fire a cauldron of molten lead and he would not hesitate to plunge into it this treasure and obliterate its existence if he imagined himself endangered.'

'So,' speculated Carrados inwardly. 'A likely precaution for a simple vine-grower of Calabria! Very well,' he assented aloud. 'I will go with you alone. Where is the place?'

Madame Ferraja searched in the ancient purse that she discovered in her rusty handbag and produced a scrap of paper.

'People do not understand sometimes my way of saying it,' she explained. 'Sette, Herringbone——'

'May I—?' said Carrados, stretching out his hand. He took the paper and touched the writing with his finger-tips. 'Oh yes, 7 Heronsbourne Place. That is on the edge of Heronsbourne Park, is it not?' He transferred the paper carefully to his desk as he spoke and stood up. 'How did you come, Madame Ferraja?'

Madame Ferraja followed the careless action with a discreet smile that did not touch her voice.

'My mother has—tried one then another, inquiring at every turning. Oh, but it was interminable,' sighed the lady.

'My mother is off for the evening—I did not expect to be

going out—but I will 'phone up a taxi and it will be at the gate as soon as we are.' He dispatched the message and then, turning to the house telephone, switched on to Greatorex.

'I'm just going round to Heronsbourne Park,' he explained. 'Don't stay, Greatorex, but if anyone calls expecting to see me, you can say that I don't anticipate being away more than an hour.'

Parkinson was hovering about the hall. With quite novel officiousness he pressed upon his master a succession of articles that were not required. Over this usually complacent attendant the unattractive features of Madame Ferraja appeared to exercise a stealthy fascination, for a dozen times the lady detected his eyes questioning her face and a dozen times he looked guiltily away again. But his incongruities could not delay for more than a few minutes the opening of the door.

'I do not accompany you, sir?' he inquired, with the suggestion plainly tendered in his voice that it would be much better if he did.

'Not this time, Parkinson.'

'Very well, sir. Is there any particular address to which we can telephone in case you are required, sir?'

'Mr Greatorex has instructions.'

Parkinson stood aside, his resources exhausted. Madame Ferraja laughed a little mockingly as they walked down the drive.

'Your man-servant thinks I may eat you, Signor Carrados,' she declared vivaciously.

Carrados, who held the key of his usually exact attendant's perturbation—for he himself had recognized in Madame Ferraja the angelic Nina Brun, of the Sicilian tetradrachm incident, from the moment she opened her mouth—admitted to himself the humour of her audacity. But it was not until half-an-hour later that enlightenment

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rewarded Parkinson. Inspector Beedel had just arrived and was speaking with Greatorëx when the conscientious valet, who had been winnowing his memory in solitude, broke in upon them, more distressed than either had ever seen him in his life before, and with the breathless introduction: 'It was the ears, sir! I have her ears at last!' poured out his tale of suspicion, recognition and his present fears.

In the meanwhile the two objects of his concern had reached the gate as the summoned taxicab drew up.

'Seven Heronsbourne Place,' called Carrados to the driver.

'No, no,' interposed the lady, with decision, 'let him stop at the beginning of the street. It is not far to walk. My husband would be on the verge of distraction if he thought in the dark that it was the arrival of the police—who knows?'

'Brackedge Road, opposite the end of Heronsbourne Place,' amended Carrados.

Heronsbourne Place had the reputation, among those who were curious in such matters, of being the most reclusive residential spot inside the four-mile circle. To earn that distinction it was, needless to say, a cul-de-sac. It bounded one side of Heronsbourne Park but did not at any point of its length give access to that pleasure. It was entirely devoted to unostentatious little houses something between the villa and the cottage, some detached and some in pairs, but all possessing the endowment of larger, more umbrageous gardens than can generally be secured within the radius. The local house agent described them as 'delightfully old-world' or 'completely modernized' according to the requirement of the applicant.

The cab was dismissed at the corner and Madame Ferraja guided her companion along the silent and deserted way. She had begun to talk with renewed animation, but

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her ceaseless chatter only served to emphasize to Carrados the one fact that it was contrived to disguise.

‘I am not causing you to miss the house with looking after me—No. 7, Madame Ferraja?’ he interposed.

‘No, certainly,’ she replied readily. ‘It is a little further. The numbers are from the other end. But we are there. Ecco!’

She stopped at a gate and opened it, still guiding him. They passed into a garden, moist and sweet-scented with the distillate odours of a dewy evening. As she turned to relatch the gate the blind man endeavoured politely to anticipate her. Between them his hat fell to the ground.

‘My clumsiness,’ he apologized, recovering it from the step. ‘My old impulses and my present helplessness, alas, Madame Ferraja!’

‘One learns prudence by experience,’ said Madame sagely. She was scarcely to know, poor lady, that even as she uttered this trite aphorism, under cover of darkness and his hat, Mr Carrados had just ruined his signet ring by blazoning a golden ‘7’ upon her garden step to establish its identity if need be. A cul-de-sac that numbered from the closed end seemed to demand some investigation.

‘Seldom,’ he replied to her remark. ‘One goes on taking risks. So we are there?’

Madame Ferraja had opened the front door with a latch-key. She dropped the latch and led Carrados forward along the narrow hall. The room they entered was at the back of the house, and from the position of the road it therefore overlooked the park. Again the door was locked behind them.

‘The celebrated Mr Carrados!’ announced Madame Ferraja with a sparkle of triumph in her voice. She waved her hand towards a lean, dark man who had stood beside the door as they entered. ‘My husband.’

‘Beneath our poor roof in the most fraternal manner,’

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commented the dark man, in the same derisive spirit. 'But it is wonderful.'

'The even more celebrated Monsieur Dompierre, unless I am mistaken?' retorted Carrados blandly. 'I bow on our first real meeting.'

'You knew!' exclaimed the Dompierre of the earlier incident incredulously. 'Stoker, you were right and I owe you a hundred lire. Who recognized you, Nina?'

'How should I know?' demanded the real Madame Dompierre crossly. 'This blind man himself, by chance.'

'You pay a poor compliment to your charming wife's personality to imagine that one could forget her so soon,' put in Carrados. 'And you a Frenchman, Dompierre!'

'You knew, Monsieur Carrados,' reiterated Dompierre, 'and yet you ventured here. You are either a fool or a hero.'

'An enthusiast—it is the same thing as both,' interposed the lady. 'What did I tell you? What did it matter if he recognized? You see?'

'Surely you exaggerate, Monsieur Dompierre,' contributed Carrados. 'I may yet pay tribute to your industry. Perhaps I regret the circumstance and the necessity but I am here to make the best of it. Let me see the things Madame has spoken of and then we can consider the detail of their price, either for myself or on behalf of others.'

There was no immediate reply. From Dompierre came a saturnine chuckle and from Madame Dompierre a titter that accompanied a grimace. For one of the rare occasions in his life Carrados found himself wholly out of touch with the atmosphere of the situation. Instinctively he turned his face towards the other occupant of the room, the man addressed as 'Stoker', whom he knew to be standing near the window.

'This unfortunate business *has* brought me an introduction,' said a familiar voice.

For one dreadful moment the universe stood still round

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Carrados. Then, with the crash and grind of overwhelming mental tumult, the whole strategy revealed itself, like the sections of a gigantic puzzle falling into place before his eyes.

There had been no robbery at the British Museum! That plausible concoction was as fictitious as the intentionally transparent tale of treasure trove. Carrados recognized now how ineffective the one device would have been without the other in drawing him—how convincing the two together—and while smarting at the humiliation of his plight he could not restrain a dash of admiration at the ingenuity—the accurately conjectured line of inference—of the plot. It was again the familiar artifice of the cunning pitfall masked by the clumsily contrived trap just beyond it. And straightway into it he had blundered!

‘And this,’ continued the same voice, ‘is Carrados, Max Carrados, upon whose perspicuity a government—only the present government, let me in justice say—depends to outwit the undesirable alien! My country; O my country!’

‘Is it really Monsieur Carrados?’ inquired Dompierre in polite sarcasm. ‘Are you sure, Nina, that you have not brought a man from Scotland Yard instead?’

‘Basta! he is here; what more do you want? Do not mock the poor sightless gentleman,’ answered Madame Dompierre, in doubtful sympathy.

‘That is exactly what I was wondering,’ ventured Carrados mildly. ‘I am here—what more do you want? Perhaps you, Mr Stoker—?’

‘Excuse me. “Stoker” is a mere colloquial appellation based on a trifling incident of my career in connection with a disabled liner. The title illustrates the childish weakness of the criminal classes for nicknames, together with their pitiable baldness of invention. My real name is Montmorency, Mr Carrados—Eustace Montmorency.’

‘Thank you, Mr Montmorency,’ said Carrados gravely.

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'We are on opposite sides of the table here tonight, but should be proud to have been with you in the stokehold of the Benvenuto.'

'That was pleasure,' muttered the Englishman. 'This is business.'

'Oh, quite so,' agreed Carrados. 'So far I am not exactly complaining. But I think it is high time to be told—and I address myself to you—why I have been decoyed here and what your purpose is.'

Mr Montmorency turned to his accomplice.

'Dompierre,' he remarked, with great clearness, 'where the devil is Mr Carrados kept standing?'

'Ah, oh, heaven!' exclaimed Madame Dompierre with tragic resignation, and flung herself down on a couch.

'Scusi,' grinned the lean man, and with burlesque grace he placed a chair for their guest's acceptance.

'Your curiosity is natural,' continued Mr Montmorency, with a cold eye towards Dompierre's antics, 'although I really think that by this time you ought to have guessed the truth. In fact, I don't doubt that you have guessed Mr Carrados, and that you are only endeavouring to gain time. For that reason—because it will perhaps convince you that we have nothing to fear—I don't mind obliging you.'

'Better hasten,' murmured Dompierre uneasily.

'Thank you, Bill,' said the Englishman, with genial effrontery. 'I won't fail to report your intelligence to the Rasojo. Yes, Mr Carrados, as you have already conjectured, it is the affair of the Countess X to which you owe this inconvenience. You will appreciate the compliment that underlies your temporary seclusion, I am sure. When circumstances favoured our plans and London became the inevitable place of meeting, you and you alone stood in the way. We guessed that you would be consulted and we frankly feared your intervention. You were consulted. We

know that Inspector Beedel visited you two days ago and he has no other case in hand. Your quiescence for just three days had to be obtained at any cost. So here you are.'

'I see,' assented Carrados. 'And having got me here, how do you propose to keep me?'

'Of course that detail has received consideration. In fact we secured this furnished house solely with that in view. There are three courses before us. The first, quite pleasant, hangs on your acquiescence. The second, more drastic, comes into operation if you decline. The third—but really, Mr Carrados, I hope you won't oblige me even to discuss the third. You will understand that it is rather objectionable for me to contemplate the necessity of two able-bodied men having to use even the smallest amount of physical compulsion towards one who is blind and helpless. I hope you will be reasonable and accept the inevitable.'

'The inevitable is the one thing that I invariably accept,' replied Carrados. 'What does it involve?'

'You will write a note to your secretary explaining that what you have learned at 7 Heronsbourne Place makes it necessary for you to go immediately abroad for a few days. By the way, Mr Carrados, although this is Heronsbourne Place it is *not* No. 7.'

'Dear, dear me,' sighed the prisoner. 'You seem to have had me at every turn, Mr Montmorency.'

'An obvious precaution. The wider course of giving you a different street altogether we rejected as being too risky in getting you here. To continue: To give conviction to the message you will direct your man Parkinson to follow by the first boat-train tomorrow, with all the requirements for a short stay, and put up at Mascot's, as usual, awaiting your arrival there.'

'Very convincing,' agreed Carrados. 'Where shall I be in reality?'

'In a charming though rather isolated bungalow on the

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south coast. Your wants will be attended to. There is a boat. You can row and fish. You will be run down by motor car and brought back to your own gate. It's really very pleasant for a few days. I've often stayed there myself.'

'Your recommendation carries weight. Suppose, for the sake of curiosity, that I decline?'

'You will still go there but your treatment will be commensurate with your behaviour. The car to take you is at this moment waiting in a convenient spot on the other side of the park. We shall go down the garden at the back, cross the park, and put you into the car—anyway.'

'And if I resist?'

The man whose pleasantry it had been to call himself Eustace Montmorency shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't be a fool,' he said tolerantly. 'You know who you are dealing with and the kind of risks we run. If you call out or endanger us at a critical point we shall not hesitate to silence you effectively.'

The blind man knew that it was no idle threat. In spite of the cloak of humour and fantasy thrown over the proceedings, he was in the power of coolly desperate men. The window was curtained and shuttered against sight and sound, the door behind him locked. Possibly at that moment a revolver threatened him; certainly weapons lay within reach of both his keepers.

'Tell me what to write,' he asked, with capitulation in his voice.

Dompierre twirled his moustache in relieved approval. Madame laughed from her place on the couch and picked up a book, watching Montmorency over the cover of its pages. As for that gentleman, he masked his satisfaction by the practical business of placing on the table before Carrados the accessories of the letter.

'Put into your own words the message that I outlined just now.'

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'Perhaps to make it altogether natural I had better write on a page of the notebook that I always use,' suggested Carrados.

'Do you wish to make it natural?' demanded Montmorency with latent suspicion.

'If the miscarriage of your plan is to result in my head being knocked—yes, I do,' was the reply.

'Good!' chuckled Dompierre, and sought to avoid Mr Montmorency's cold glance by turning on the electric table-lamp for the blind man's benefit. Madame Dompierre laughed shrilly.

'Thank you, Monsieur,' said Carrados, 'you have done quite right. What is light to you is warmth to me—heat, energy, inspiration. Now to business.'

He took out the pocket-book he had spoken of and leisurely proceeded to flatten it down upon the table before him. As his tranquil, pleasant eyes ranged the room meanwhile it was hard to believe that the shutters of an impenetrable darkness lay between them and the world. They rested for a moment on the two accomplices who stood beyond the table, picked out Madame Dompierre lolling on the sofa on his right, and measured the proportions of the long, narrow room. They seemed to note the positions of the window at the one end and the door almost at the other, and even to take into account the single pendent electric light which up till then had been the sole illuminant.

'You prefer pencil?' asked Montmorency.

'I generally use it for casual purposes. But not,' he added, touching the point critically, 'like this.'

Alert for any sign of retaliation, they watched him take an insignificant penknife from his pocket and begin to trim the pencil. Was there in his mind any mad impulse to force conclusions with that puny weapon? Dompierre worked his face into a fiercer expression and touched reassuringly the handle of his knife. Montmorency looked on.

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for a moment, then, whistling softly to himself, turned his back on the table and strolled towards the window, avoiding Madame Nina's pursuant eye.

Then, with overwhelming suddenness, it came, and in its form altogether unexpected.

Carrados had been putting the last strokes to the pencil, whittling it down upon the table. There had been no hasty movement, no violent act to give them warning; only the little blade had pushed itself nearer and nearer to the electric light cord lying there . . . and suddenly and instantly the room was plunged into absolute darkness.

'To the door, Dom!' shouted Montmorency in a flash. 'I am at the window. Don't let him pass and we are all right.'

'I am here,' responded Dompierre from the door.

'He will not attempt to pass,' came the quiet voice of Carrados from across the room. 'You are now all exactly where I want you. You are both covered. If either moves an inch, I fire—and remember that I shoot by sound, not sight.'

'But—but what does it mean?' stammered Montmorency, above the despairing wail of Madame Dompierre.

'It means that we are now on equal terms—three blind men in a dark room. The numerical advantage that you possess is counterbalanced by the fact that you are out of your element—I am in mine.'

'Dom,' whispered Montmorency across the dark space, 'strike a match. I have none.'

'I would not, Dompierre, if I were you,' advised Carrados, with a short laugh. 'It might be dangerous.' At once his voice seemed to leap into a passion. 'Drop that match-box,' he cried. 'You are standing on the brink of your grave, you fool! Drop it, I say; let me hear it fall.'

A breath of thought—almost too short to call a pause—then a little thud of surrender sounded from the carpet

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by the door. The two conspirators seemed to hold their breath.

'That is right.' The placid voice once more resumed its sway. 'Why cannot things be agreeable? I hate to have to shout, but you seem far from grasping the situation yet. Remember that I do not take the slightest risk. Also please remember, Mr Montmorency, that the action even of a hair-trigger automatic scrapes slightly as it comes up. I remind you of that for your own good, because if you are so ill-advised as to think of trying to pot me in the dark, that noise gives me a fifth of a second start of you. Do you by any chance know Zinghi's in Mercer Street?'

'The shooting gallery?' asked Mr Montmorency a little sulkily.

'The same. If you happen to come through this alive and are interested you might ask Zinghi to show you a target of mine that he keeps. Seven shots at twenty yards, the target indicated by four watches, none of them so loud as the one you are wearing. He keeps it as a curiosity.'

'I wear no watch,' muttered Dompierre, expressing his thought aloud.

'No, Monsieur Dompierre, but you wear a heart, and that not on your sleeve,' said Carrados. 'Just now it is quite as loud as Mr Montmorency's watch. It is more central too—I shall not have to allow any margin. That is right; breath naturally'—for the unhappy Dompierre had given a gasp of apprehension. 'It does not make any difference to me, and after a time holding one's breath becomes really painful.'

'Monsieur,' declared Dompierre earnestly, 'there was no intention of submitting you to injury, I swear. This Englishman did but speak within his hat. At the most extreme you would have been but bound and gagged. Take care: killing is a dangerous game.'

'For you—not for me,' was the bland rejoinder. 'If you

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kill me you will be hanged for it. If I kill you I shall be honourably acquitted. You can imagine the scene—the sympathetic court—the recital of your villainies—the story of my indignities. Then with stumbling feet and groping hands the helpless blind man is led forward to give evidence. Sensation! No, no, it isn't really fair but I can kill you both with absolute certainty and Providence will be saddled with all the responsibility. Please don't fidget with your feet, Monsieur Dompierre. I know that you aren't moving but one is liable to make mistakes.'

'Before I die,' said Montmorency—and for some reason laughed unconvincingly in the dark—'before I die, Mr Carrados, I should really like to know what has happened to the light. That, surely, isn't Providence?'

'Would it be ungenerous to suggest that you are trying to gain time? You ought to know what has happened. But as it may satisfy you that I have nothing to fear from delay, I don't mind telling you. In my hand was a sharp knife—contemptible, you were satisfied, as a weapon; beneath my nose the "flex" of the electric lamp. It was only necessary for me to draw the one across the other and the system was short-circuited. Every lamp on that fuse is cut off and in the distributing-box in the hall you will find a burned-out wire. You, perhaps—but Monsieur Dompierre's experience in plating ought to have put him up to simple electricity.'

'How did you know that there is a distributing-box in the hall?' asked Dompierre, with dull resentment.

'My dear Dompierre, why beat the air with futile questions?' replied Max Carrados. 'Whatever does it matter? Have it in the cellar if you like.'

'True,' interposed Montmorency. 'The only thing that need concern us now——'

'But it is in the hall—nine feet high,' muttered Dompierre in bitterness. 'Yet he, this blind man——'

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'The only thing that need concern us,' repeated the Englishman, severely ignoring the interruption, 'is what you intend doing in the end, Mr Carrados?'

'The end is a little difficult to foresee,' was the admission. 'So far, I am all for maintaining the status quo. Will the first grey light of morning find us still in this impasse? No, for between us we have condemned the room to eternal darkness. Probably about daybreak Dompierre will drop off to sleep and roll against the door. I, unfortunately, mistaking his intention, will send a bullet through—Pardon, Madame, I should have remembered—but pray don't move.'

'I protest, Monsieur——'

'Don't protest; just sit still. Very likely it will be Mr Montmorency who will fall off to sleep the first after all.'

'Then we will anticipate that difficulty,' said the one in question, speaking with renewed decision. 'We will play the last hand with our cards upon the table if you like. Nina, Mr Carrados will not injure you whatever happens—be sure of that. When the moment comes you will rise——'

'One word,' put in Carrados with determination. 'My position is precarious and I take no risks. As you say, I cannot injure Madame Dompierre, and you two men are therefore my hostages for her good behaviour. If she rises from the couch you, Dompierre, fall. If she advances another step Mr Montmorency follows you.'

'Do nothing rash, carissima,' urged her husband, with passionate solicitude. 'You might get hit in place of me. We will yet find a better way.'

'You dare not, Mr Carrados!' flung out Montmorency, for the first time beginning to show signs of wear in this duel of the temper. 'He dare not, Dompierre. In cold blood and unprovoked! No jury would acquit you!'

'Another who fails to do you justice, Madame Nina,' said the blind man, with ironic gallantry. 'The action

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might be a little high-handed, one admits, but when you, appropriately clothed and in your right complexion, stepped into the witness-box and I said: "Gentlemen of the jury, what is my crime? That I made Madame Dompierre a widow!" can you doubt their gratitude and my acquittal? Truly my countrymen are not all bats or monks, Madame.' Dompierre was breathing with perfect freedom now, while from the couch came the sounds of stifled emotion, but whether the lady was involved in a paroxysm of sobs or of laughter it might be difficult to swear.

* * *

It was perhaps an hour after the flourish of the introduction with which Madame Dompierre had closed the door of the trap upon the blind man's entrance.

The minutes had passed but the situation remained unchanged, though the ingenuity of certainly two of the occupants of the room had been tormented into shreds to discover a means of turning it to their advantage. So far the terrible omniscience of the blind man in the dark and the respect for his marksmanship with which his coolness had inspired them, dominated the group. But one strong card yet remained to be played, and at last the moment came upon which the conspirators had pinned their despairing hopes.

There was the sound of movement in the hall outside, not the first about the house, but towards the new complication Carrados had been strangely unobservant. True, Montmorency had talked rather loudly, to carry over the dangerous moments. But now there came an unmistakable step and to the accomplices it could only mean one thing. Montmorency was ready on the instant.

'Down, Dom!' he cried, 'throw yourself down! Break in, Guido. Break in the door. We are held up!'

There was an immediate response. The door, under the

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pressure of a human battering-ram, burst open with a crash. On the threshold the intruders—four or five in number—stopped starkly for a moment, held in astonishment by the extraordinary scene that the light from the hall, and of their own bull's-eyes, revealed.

Flat on their faces, to present the least possible surface to Carrados's aim, Dompierre and Montmorency lay extended beside the window and behind the door. On the couch, with her head buried beneath the cushions, Madame Dompierre sought to shut out the sight and sound of violence. Carrados—Carrados had not moved, but with arms resting on the table and fingers placidly locked together he smiled benignly on the new arrivals. His attitude, compared with the extravagance of those around him, gave the impression of a complacent modern deity presiding over some grotesque ceremonial of pagan worship.

‘So, Inspector, you could not wait for me, after all?’ was his greeting.

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MORE RIVALS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

COSMOPOLITAN CRIMES

For my three musketeers Donald, Edward and Stuart
these foreign excursions

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It has been by no means easy to trace copyright holders. If in any case I have failed I offer my apologies.

I am grateful to Mrs Dorothy Cheston Bennett and Penguin Ltd for permission to use the extract from Arnold Bennett's Journals in the Introduction.

Mr H. Agerbak, the Counsellor for Press and Cultural Affairs at the Royal Danish Embassy in London, provided me with much interesting information about Baron Palle Rosenkrantz. Miss J. Houlgate, the BBC Reference Librarian, was helpful with other biographical details.

For anyone working on the detective stories of this period there are four indispensable books of reference: *Victorian Detective Fiction* by Graham Greene and Dorothy Glover (Bodley Head, 1966), *Queen's Quorum* by Ellery Queen (Gollancz, 1953), *The Detective Short Story* by Ellery Queen (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1942), and *Murder for Pleasure* by Howard Haycraft (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1941).



Introduction

I have limited this collection, as I did *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, to stories published between the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes in the *Strand Magazine* in 1891 and the outbreak of war in 1914. This is a self-contained period with its own character. With the invention of Sherlock Holmes Conan Doyle changed the character of the short detective story, and the first world war changed the character of the world in which the stories were set.

In this collection the connecting link between the stories is that they are all, in some sense, foreign affairs. In one adventure a French detective is at work in London. In the others detectives, agents and rogues are pursuing their business in France, Switzerland, South Africa, Belgium, the United States, Denmark, Austria and Canada.

From the time of Edgar Allan Poe onwards the United States, England and France have produced all the most famous and successful writers of detective stories. Other countries have tended to rely, as one can still see on every railway bookstall in Europe, on translations from English and French. I have, however, been able to find for this collection stories by a Danish and an Austro-Hungarian writer which have never appeared before in English. The literary quality, and the fame, of the writers varies

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considerably. Of my own favourites Maurice Leblanc, the creator of Arsène Lupin, has never been completely forgotten. Grant Allen, Jacques Futrelle and Robert Barr (the author of one remarkable story), though they have sunk into semi-oblivion, seem to me to be among the best of their kind. Arnold Bennett is not usually thought of as a writer of detective stories and the book from which I have taken an episode seems never to have been reprinted. About the work of E. Phillips Oppenheim, still a famous name, there is a strong flavour of overripe cheese, which appeals to some palates, including, in small helpings, my own. Reviewers and readers of *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* had different favourites, which by no means always coincided with my own, and I hope that will again prove to be the case with this collection.

I begin with two episodes by Grant Allen (1848–1899) from *An African Millionaire*, one of the most amusing collections of crime stories ever written. It appeared in book form in 1897 with delightful illustrations by Gordon Browne, having first seen the light in the *Strand Magazine* in 1896 and 1897. I have included two episodes because space is required for a full appreciation of the long drawn out feud between Sir Charles Vandrift, the South African millionaire, and the ingenious Colonel Clay. Grant Allen was born in Canada of Irish and French-Canadian ancestry. He won a classical Postmastership at Merton College, Oxford (which gives me a certain fellow feeling for him) and he had a hard time throughout his university career as he had an invalid wife and little money. After Oxford he was appointed Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy in a newly founded university for negroes at Spanish Town, Jamaica. The university soon collapsed for lack of students and Grant Allen returned to England to make his living by writing. His output in the twenty-three years of life which remained to him was extraordinarily varied. It included poetry,

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essays, popular science and botany, theology and fiction. The book which attracted most attention in his lifetime was a novel called *The Woman Who Did* published by John Lane in 1895 in his Keynotes series with a title-page designed by Aubrey Beardsley. It deals, in the purest language, with the life of a sweet girl graduate from Girton who insisted, on the highest principles, on having a love affair and a child without marriage, and it was condemned by the Mrs Whitehouses of the time as extremely saucy and scandalous. Grant Allen wrote two other excellent books of stories with a semi-detective interest, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* and *Hilda Wade* and two novels in which detectives play a part, *The Scallywag* and *A Splendid Sin*. Perhaps the fact that none of his detective books are mentioned in the American reference book, *British Authors of the Nineteenth Century*, reflects a too modest contemporary estimation of them as compared with his so-called serious work. He died just before completing *Hilda Wade* and the final episode in this book which appeared in the *Strand Magazine* in 1900 (under the appropriate title *The Episode of the Dead Man Who Spoke*) was written, from conversations on his death bed, by his friend and neighbour Dr Conan Doyle.

George Chetwynd Griffith (1859-1906) was one of the best thriller writers of the eighteen nineties. *The Outlaws of the Air* about a group of anarchists which terrorizes the world from a gigantic airship (New Scotland Yard, the General Post Office, St Paul's and the Houses of Parliament are all destroyed) and *The Great Pirate Syndicate* about a war between Europe and the Anglo-Saxon Federation still make excellent reading. So far as I can establish he only wrote two books of detective interest and from one of these I have taken a story about I.D.B. on the South African diamond fields. George Griffith, who was the son of a country clergyman, seems to have seen his own short life as one continuous thriller. I need only to reproduce his entry from

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Who's Who. 'Educ. had the advantage of neglected early instruction; got his education wandering about the world; sea-apprentice; sundowner; sailor; stock-rider; butcher; globe-trotter (record round the world in $64\frac{1}{2}$ days); school-master; journalist; story-writer. *Recreations*: loafing, travelling and sailing; went $6\frac{1}{2}$ times round the world; once across the Rockies, thrice over the Andes (treasured a pipe smoked at 19,300 feet above sea-level); three times round the Horn; found the source of the Amazon river-system; flew in a balloon from London to the field of Agincourt, last Englishman who fell there.' Obviously a happy man.

Arnold Bennett (1867–1931) was by no means too modest about his few detective stories and might, I think, have been rather pleased to find himself in a collection like this. About the book of stories from which I have chosen one he wrote in his diary for Friday, November 27th, 1903: 'This morning I finished the six *Windsor** stories. They will probably be issued as a book under the title *The Loot of Cities*, and I shall make out of them, first and last, from £200 to £250—probably the smaller sum. They have occupied less than two months of my time. I began well, languished in the middle, and fired up tremendously towards the end. Indeed I wrote the last three stories in twelve days. And if I had really tried I could have done the whole six in a month. I have learnt a lot about the technique of construction while writing them. And on the whole have not been bored. But once or twice I have been terribly bored.' On December 1st of the same year he noted in his diary that the six stories in *The Loot of Cities* were 'all good on their plane'. Bennett's other excursion into crime fiction was *The Grand Babylon Hotel* which, unlike *The Loot of Cities*, has been reprinted from time to time. About this book he remarked with some pride in his diary on January 18th, 1901, that 'the *Graphic* people' before its serialization in a

* The reference is to the *Windsor Magazine*, a rival of the *Strand*.

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periodical called *The Golden Penny* had issued a circular comparing it with Fergus Hume's famous book *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. 'Fancy,' said Bennett, 'writing a story as good as *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*.' Today it seems much better.

Robert Barr (1850-1912) was a prolific writer of romances under his own name and the pseudonym Luke Sharp. He owes his survival to one book, *The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont*, and, in fact, to one story in that book, *The Absent-Minded Coterie*, one of the most ingenious detective stories ever written. Otherwise he wrote no detective fiction apart from some short pastiches of Sherlock Holmes (whom he called Sherlaw Kombs) and one very bizarre long short story *From Whose Bourne*, an odd mixture of ghost story and detective story in which a dead man with the aid of some other ghosts investigates his own supposed murder. As was a fairly common publishing practice at the time, *The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont* was presented as if it was a full-length novel and not a collection of short stories, and *The Absent-Minded Coterie*, which seems such an intriguing title, is the heading of one of the three chapters into which the story was divided on its first publication. Robert Barr was born in Glasgow and was taken to Canada and the United States as a child. He became headmaster of a school in Windsor, Ontario when he was barely twenty. He then changed over to journalism and joined the *Detroit Free Press*, which sent him as its correspondent to London in 1881. He became a popular writer of magazine stories and launched *The Idler*, with Jerome K. Jerome and John Oxenham. His detective Eugène Valmont, once 'chief detective to the Government of France', was, it has been suggested, the model for Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. However that may be, there are certainly marked resemblances.

Jacques Futrelle (1875-1912) went down in the Titanic. If he had lived he might, one feels, have established himself

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as one of the best American detective story writers. He was born in Pike County, Georgia, and became a journalist with the *Boston American* and a theatrical manager. His most striking creation was Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, known as The Thinking Machine, one of the most original detectives of the period. Professor Van Dusen appeared in three books, first in a rather inferior adventure story called *The Chase of the Golden Plate* and then in two volumes of short stories *The Thinking Machine* and *The Thinking Machine on the Case*. *The Thinking Machine*, which was published over here by Chapman & Hall in 1907 and never reprinted in this country, is a very rare book indeed. I have never seen a copy except in the British Museum and even the publisher no longer has a file copy. It is pleasantly illustrated by The Kinneys, whose work is otherwise unknown to me. *The Thinking Machine on the Case* was published in this country under the title *The Professor on the Case* in 1909 as Number 62 in Nelson's splendid red cloth Sevenpenny Edition, which normally consisted of reprints. That was its first and only appearance in England and anybody fortunate, as I am, to possess a copy is the probably unwitting owner of quite a valuable first edition. My copy cost me one shilling and sixpence at a second-hand bookshop in the Brompton Road, which, like most of the shops at which my collection was assembled, alas no longer exists. Like *The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont*, *The Professor on the Case* was presented by its publisher as if it was a full-length novel. I have included two Futrelle stories in this collection, one from each volume, to show Professor Van Dusen at work in very different settings.

About Maurice Leblanc, the creator of Arsène Lupin, I have been able to discover very little apart from the fact that he was born in Rouen in 1864 and died in Perpignan in 1941. It was thought at one time that he had died in 1926. This was corrected by Howard Haycraft in his invaluable

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book *Murder for Pleasure* which was published in 1941. At that time nothing had been heard of Maurice Leblanc since the German invasion of France. He had been made a member of the Legion of Honour in 1919. One must assume that he was a quiet man who, in spite of his great success, shunned publicity. It is said that he liked working at café tables in the open air. About his stories there is a unique charm and vivacity (which survives in the contemporary translation) and I make no apology for including two Lupin stories, in both of which Lupin confronts his old antagonist Chief-Inspector Ganimard. Another detective who appears in some Lupin stories is Holmlock Shears. The Leblanc bibliography is complicated by the number of different titles under which his books appeared both in England and America. Between 1909 and 1911 one book appeared under three titles in England (*The Fair-Haired Lady*, *Arsène Lupin versus Holmlock Shears* and *The Arrest of Arsène Lupin*) and under two more titles in the United States (*The Blonde Lady* and *Arsène Lupin versus Herlock Sholmes*). A nightmare for collectors.

Baron Palle Adam Vilhelm Rosenkrantz (1867–1941), whose story in this collection strikes me as rather charmingly cynical, was descended from the man whose name must have been in Shakespeare's mind when he wrote *Hamlet*. The earlier Palle Rosenkrantz studied at Wittenberg from 1604 to 1606 and afterwards paid several visits to England. On one of these visits, accompanied by another young Danish nobleman called Gyldenstierne, he was an envoy from the King of Denmark to the court of King James I. They did not, however, meet a violent end like their namesakes and went on to give distinguished service in war and peace to the Danish crown. Our Palle Rosenkrantz was regarded when he died as one of Denmark's leading men of letters. He had studied law at Copenhagen University and was then an assistant to a judge, a member of a solicitor's

firm and a functionary in a telephone company before he was called to the bar in 1909. He started writing to earn some more money, and his first story, *An Admission*, was inspired by his indignation at a case of police injustice. His concern about police brutality and the need for a reform of the Danish legal system were the basis for his first novels, plays and detective stories. Later he wrote historical novels, family history, constitutional history, autobiographies and, in the nineteen thirties, very successful radio plays. He translated some of Bernard Shaw's plays, including *Pygmalion*, into Danish. One of his full-length detective novels, *The Magistrate's Own Case*, was published in English by Methuen in 1908 and is a readable and ingenious story. His short detective stories about Lieutenant Holst of the Copenhagen police have never, until the appearance of one of them in this collection, been translated. Many of his books are still read in Denmark today but most of his detective stories seem to have been forgotten, and even second-hand copies have not been seen in Copenhagen for many years.

Balduin Groller was the pseudonym of Adalbert Goldscheider who was born in 1848 at Arad in Hungary (now Romania) and died in Vienna in 1916. He edited two well-known Vienna papers, the *Neue Illustrierte Zeitung* and the *Neue Wiener Journal*. He published a number of romances and humorous tales from 1880 onwards and between 1910 and 1912 six slim volumes of short stories about the experiences (adventures would be too strong a term) of his detective Dagobert. There is nothing of the professional about Dagobert who moves among the highest social circles of Vienna in an aroma of wine, rich food, cigar smoke and perfume. The successful Jewish journalist from one of the most eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire somehow managed to preserve in his usually rather gay little stories something of the overblown charm of Vienna on the edge of the precipice.

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I have already remarked on the somewhat pungent flavour of the writings of Edward Phillips Oppenheim (1866–1946). His first novel was published when he was twenty-one and for more than fifty years he kept up an average of more than three books a year. This puts him in the William Le Queux class. Most of his enormous output comes into the category of diplomatic intrigue and romance rather than crime or detection, and, of the books of short stories he published before 1914, only one, *Mr Laxworthy's Adventures*, can, even with the utmost latitude, be said to qualify for this collection. But one cannot ignore Oppenheim. So here is Mr Laxworthy, and I recommend the opening scene in 'the magnificent buffet of the Gare de Lyons' to connoisseurs of Oppenheim at his ripest. Oppenheim was married to an American and he divided his years between the French Riviera, Guernsey and Mayfair until the German invasion of France which finally forced him to leave Nice for London. In his autobiography, *The Pool of Memory*, published in November 1941, he gives a peevish, and somehow rather distasteful, account of what he calls the 'hard times' he and other wealthy English inhabitants of the south of France went through in the winter of 1940 to 1941. Still there was always Monsieur Tamme, proprietor of the Montfleuri Hotel, 'among other excellent qualities a born hotelier' who 'was not the sort of man to be caught napping'. He had plenty of coal and coke, wines of the best vintages and 'considerable stores of everything that was necessary for the delectation of his guests'. So, however hard the times, it was not entirely easy to take off for England via Spain and Portugal, and back in London it was disturbing to find that the Minister of Information, Mr Duff Cooper, was 'less curious than I had expected about the French situation'. Alas for the creator of so many secret agents who in their heyday had swayed the fate of governments!

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The last story in this collection, by H. Hesketh Prichard (1876–1922), is something of a curiosity. Detectives of fiction usually move in big cities or among the international crowd in Monaco, Switzerland or the south of France. The hero of Hesketh Prichard's only book of detective stories is November Joe, a Canadian woodsman who is employed under contract by the Quebec provincial police to help them with the investigation of crimes committed in the wilderness. As one of the characters in the book remarks: 'The speciality of a Sherlock Holmes is the everyday routine of a woodsman. Observation and deduction are part and parcel of his daily existence. He literally reads as he runs. The floor of the forest is his page'. So in Hesketh Prichard's book the methods of Baker Street are practised in the Quebec backwoods. Hesketh Prichard, who won the DSO and MC as a sniper in France, was a traveller, hunter, cricketer, naturalist and romantic novelist. He lived this extraordinarily active life in spite of a heart defect which led to his being rejected for the army until the outbreak of war. His output of books on sport and travel was considerable, and with his mother he wrote *The Chronicles of Don Q* from which Douglas Fairbanks made a famous silent film.

I

The Episode of the Mexican Seer

Grant Allen

My name is Seymour Wilbraham Wentworth. I am brother-in-law and secretary to Sir Charles Vandrift, the South African millionaire and famous financier. Many years ago, when Charlie Vandrift was a small lawyer in Cape Town, I had the (qualified) good fortune to marry his sister. Much later, when the Vandrift estate and farm near Kimberley developed by degrees into the Cloetedorp Golcondas, Limited, my brother-in-law offered me the not unremunerative post of secretary; in which capacity I have ever since been his constant and attached companion.

He is not a man whom any common sharper can take in, is Charles Vandrift. Middle height, square build, firm mouth, keen eyes—the very picture of a sharp and successful business genius. I have only known one rogue impose upon Sir Charles, and that one rogue, as the Commissary of Police at Nice remarked, would doubtless have imposed upon a syndicate of Vidocq, Robert Houdin, and Cagliostro.

We had run across to the Riviera for a few weeks in the season. Our object being strictly rest and recreation from

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the arduous duties of financial combination, we did not think it necessary to take our wives out with us. Indeed, Lady Vandrift is absolutely wedded to the joys of London, and does not appreciate the rural delights of the Mediterranean littoral. But Sir Charles and I, though immersed in affairs when at home, both thoroughly enjoy the complete change from the City to the charming vegetation and pellucid air on the terrace at Monte Carlo. We *are* so fond of scenery. That delicious view over the rocks of Monaco, with the Maritime Alps in the rear, and the blue sea in front, not to mention the imposing Casino in the foreground, appeals to me as one of the most beautiful prospects in all Europe. Sir Charles has a sentimental attachment for the place. He finds it restores and refreshes him, after the turmoil of London, to win a few hundred at roulette in the course of an afternoon among the palms and cactuses and pure breezes of Monte Carlo. The country, say I, for a jaded intellect! However, we never on any account actually stop in the Principality itself. Sir Charles thinks Monte Carlo is not a sound address for a financier's letters. He prefers a comfortable hotel on the Promenade des Anglais at Nice, where he recovers health and renovates his nervous system by taking daily excursions along the coast to the Casino.

This particular season we were snugly ensconced at the Hotel des Anglais. We had capital quarters on the first floor—salon, study, and bedrooms—and found on the spot a most agreeable cosmopolitan society. All Nice, just then, was ringing with talk about a curious impostor, known to his followers as the Great Mexican Seer, and supposed to be gifted with second sight, as well as with endless other supernatural powers. Now, it is a peculiarity of my able brother-in-law's that, when he meets with a quack, he burns to expose him; he is so keen a man of business himself that it gives him, so to speak, a disinterested pleasure to unmask and detect imposture in others. Many ladies at the hotel,

some of whom had met and conversed with the Mexican Seer, were constantly telling us strange stories of his doings. He had disclosed to one the present whereabouts of a run-away husband; he had pointed out to another the numbers that would win at roulette next evening; he had shown a third the image on a screen of the man she had for years adored without his knowledge. Of course, Sir Charles didn't believe a word of it; but his curiosity was roused; he wished to see and judge for himself of the wonderful thought-reader.

'What would be his terms, do you think, for a private *séance*?' he asked of Madame Picardet, the lady to whom the Seer had successfully predicted the winning numbers.

'He does not work for money,' Madame Picardet answered, 'but for the good of humanity. I'm sure he would gladly come and exhibit for nothing his miraculous faculties.'

'Nonsense!' Sir Charles answered. 'The man must live. I'd pay him five guineas, though, to see him alone. What hotel is he stopping at?'

'The Cosmopolitan, I think,' the lady answered. 'Oh no; I remember now, the Westminster.'

Sir Charles turned to me quietly. 'Look here, Seymour,' he whispered. 'Go round to this fellow's place immediately after dinner, and offer him five pounds to give a private *séance* at once in my rooms, without mentioning who I am to him; keep the name quite quiet. Bring him back with you, too, and come straight upstairs with him, so that there may be no collusion. We'll see just how much the fellow can tell us.'

I went as directed. I found the Seer a very remarkable and interesting person. He stood about Sir Charles's own height, but was slimmer and straighter, with an aquiline nose, strangely piercing eyes, very large black pupils, and a finely-chiselled close-shaven face, like the bust of Antinous

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in our hall in Mayfair. What gave him his most characteristic touch, however, was his odd head of hair, curly and wavy like Paderewski's, standing out in a halo round his high white forehead and his delicate profile. I could see at a glance why he succeeded so well in impressing women; he had the look of a poet, a singer, a prophet.

'I have come round,' I said, 'to ask whether you will consent to give a *séance* at once in a friend's rooms; and my principal wishes me to add that he is prepared to pay five pounds as the price of the entertainment.'

Señor Antonio Herrera—that was what he called himself—bowed to me with impressive Spanish politeness. His dusky olive cheeks were wrinkled with a smile of gentle contempt as he answered gravely—

'I do not sell my gifts; I bestow them freely. If your friend—your anonymous friend—desires to behold the cosmic wonders that are wrought through my hands, I am glad to show them to him. Fortunately, as often happens when it is necessary to convince and confound a sceptic (for that your friend is a sceptic I feel instinctively), I chance to have no engagements at all this evening.' He ran his hand through his fine, long hair reflectively. 'Yes, I go,' he continued, as if addressing some unknown presence that hovered about the ceiling; 'I go; come with me!' Then he put on his broad sombrero, with its crimson ribbon, wrapped a cloak round his shoulders, lighted a cigarette, and strode forth by my side towards the Hotel des Anglais.

He talked little by the way, and that little in curt sentences. He seemed buried in deep thought; indeed, when we reached the door and I turned in, he walked a step or two farther on, as if not noticing to what place I had brought him. Then he drew himself up short, and gazed around him for a moment. 'Ha, the Anglais,' he said—and I may mention in passing that his English, in spite of a

slight southern accent, was idiomatic and excellent. 'It is here, then; it is here!' He was addressing once more the unseen presence.

I smiled to think that these childish devices were intended to deceive Sir Charles Vandrift. Not quite the sort of man (as the City of London knows) to be taken in by hocus-pocus. And all this, I saw, was the cheapest and most commonplace conjurer's patter.

We went upstairs to our rooms. Charles had gathered together a few friends to watch the performance. The Seer entered, wrapt in thought. He was in evening dress, but a red sash round his waist gave a touch of picturesqueness and a dash of colour. He paused for a moment in the middle of the salon, without letting his eyes rest on anybody or anything. Then he walked straight up to Charles, and held out his dark hand.

'Good evening,' he said. 'You are the host. My soul's sight tells me so.'

'Good shot,' Sir Charles answered. 'These fellows have to be quick-witted, you know, Mrs Mackenzie, or they'd never get on at it.'

The Seer gazed about him, and smiled blankly at a person or two whose faces he seemed to recognize from a previous existence. Then Charles began to ask him a few simple questions, not about himself, but about me, just to test him. He answered most of them with surprising correctness. 'His name? His name begins with an S I think:—You call him Seymour.' He paused long between each clause, as if the facts were revealed to him slowly. 'Seymour—Wilbraham—Earl of Strafford. No, not Earl of Strafford! Seymour Wilbraham Wentworth. There seems to be some connection in somebody's mind now present between Wentworth and Strafford. I am not English. I do not know what it means. But they are somehow the same name, Wentworth and Strafford.'

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He gazed around, apparently for confirmation. A lady came to his rescue.

'Wentworth was the surname of the great Earl of Strafford,' she murmured gently; 'and I was wondering, as you spoke, whether Mr Wentworth might possibly be descended from him.'

'He is,' the Seer replied instantly, with a flash of those dark eyes. And I thought this curious; for though my father always maintained the reality of the relationship, there was one link wanting to complete the pedigree. He could not make sure that the Hon. Thomas Wilbraham Wentworth was the father of Jonathan Wentworth, the Bristol horse-dealer, from whom we are descended.

'Where was I born?' Sir Charles interrupted, coming suddenly to his own case.

The Seer clapped his two hands to his forehead and held it between them, as if to prevent it from bursting. 'Africa', he said slowly, as the facts narrowed down, so to speak. 'South Africa; Cape of Good Hope; Jansenville; De Witt Street. 1840.'

'By jove, he's correct,' Sir Charles muttered. 'He seems really to do it. Still, he may have found me out. He may have known where he was coming.'

'I never gave a hint,' I answered; 'till he reached the door, he didn't even know to what hotel I was piloting him.'

The Seer stroked his chin softly. His eye appeared to me to have a furtive gleam in it. 'Would you like me to tell you the number of a bank-note inclosed in an envelope?' he asked casually.

'Go out of the room,' Sir Charles said, 'while I pass it round the company.'

Señor Herrera disappeared. Sir Charles passed it round cautiously, holding it all the time in his own hand, but letting his guests see the number. Then he placed it in an envelope and gummed it down firmly.

Grant Allen

The Seer returned. His keen eyes swept the company with a comprehensive glance. He shook his shaggy mane. Then he took the envelope in his hands and gazed at it fixedly. 'AF, 73549,' he answered, in a slow tone. 'A Bank of England note for fifty pounds—exchanged at the Casino for gold won yesterday at Monte Carlo.'

'I see how he did that,' Sir Charles said triumphantly. 'He must have changed it there himself; and then I changed it back again. In point of fact, I remember seeing a fellow with long hair loafing about. Still, it's capital conjuring.'

'He can see through matter,' one of the ladies interposed. It was Madame Picardet. 'He can see through a box.' She drew a little gold vinaigrette, such as our grandmothers used, from her dress-pocket. 'What is in this?' she inquired, holding it up to him.

Señor Herrera gazed through it. 'Three gold coins,' he replied, knitting his brows with the effort of seeing into the box: 'one, an American five dollars; one, a French ten-franc piece; one, twenty marks, German, of the old Emperor William.'

She opened the box and pased it round. Sir Charles smiled a quiet smile.

'Confederacy!' he muttered, half to himself. 'Confederacy!'

The Seer turned to him with a sullen air. 'You want a better sign?' he said, in a very impressive voice. 'A sign that will convince you! Very well: you have a letter in your left waistcoat pocket—a crumpled-up letter. Do you wish me to read it out? I will, if you desire it.'

It may seem to those who know Sir Charles incredible, but, I am bound to admit, my brother-in-law coloured. What that letter contained I cannot say; he only answered, very testily and evasively, 'No, thank you; I won't trouble you. The exhibition you have already given us of your skill

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in this kind more than amply suffices.' And his fingers strayed nervously to his waistcoat pocket, as if he was half afraid, even then, Señor Herrera would read it.

I fancied too, he glanced somewhat anxiously towards Madame Picardet.

The Seer bowed courteously. 'Your will, señor, is law,' he said. 'I make it a principle, though I can see through all things, invariably to respect the secrecies and sanctities. If it were not so, I might dissolve society. For which of us is there who could bear the whole truth being told about him?' He gazed around the room. An unpleasant thrill supervened. Most of us felt this uncanny Spanish American knew really too much. And some of us were engaged in financial operations.

'For example,' the Seer continued blandly, 'I happened a few weeks ago to travel down here from Paris by train with a very intelligent man, a company promoter. He had in his bag some documents—some confidential documents:' he glanced at Sir Charles. 'You know the kind of thing, my dear sir: reports from experts—from mining engineers. You may have seen some such; marked *strictly private*.'

'They form an element in high finance,' Sir Charles admitted coldly.

'Pre-cisely,' the Seer murmured, his accent for a moment less Spanish than before. 'And, as they were marked *strictly private*, I respect, of course, the seal of confidence. That's all I wish to say. I hold it a duty, being intrusted with such powers, not to use them in a manner which may annoy or incommode my fellow-creatures.'

'Your feeling does you honour,' Sir Charles answered, with some acerbity. Then he whispered in my ear: 'Confounded clever scoundrel, Sey; rather wish we hadn't brought him here.'

Señor Herrera seemed intuitively to divine this wish, for he interposed, in a lighter and gayer tone—

'I will now show you a different and more interesting embodiment of occult power, for which we shall need a somewhat subdued arrangement of surrounding lights. Would you mind, señor host—for I have purposely abstained from reading your name on the brain of any one present—would you mind my turning down this lamp just a little? . . . So! That will do. Now, this one; and this one. Exactly! that's right.' He poured a few grains of powder out of a packet into a saucer. 'Next, a match, if you please. Thank you!' It burnt with a strange green light. He drew from his pocket a card, and produced a little ink-bottle. 'Have you a pen?' he asked.

I instantly brought one. He handed it to Sir Charles. 'Oblige me,' he said, 'by writing your name there.' And he indicated a place in the centre of the card, which had an embossed edge, with a small middle square of a different colour.

Sir Charles has a natural disinclination to signing his name without knowing why. 'What do you want with it?' he asked. (A millionaire's signature has so many uses.)

'I want you to put the card in an envelope,' the Seer replied, 'and then to burn it. After that, I shall show you your own name written in letters of blood on my arm, in your own handwriting.'

Sir Charles took the pen. If the signature was to be burned as soon as finished, he didn't mind giving it. He wrote his name in his usual firm clear style—the writing of a man who knows his worth and is not afraid of drawing a cheque for five thousand.

'Look at it long,' the Seer said, from the other side of the room. He had not watched him write it.

Sir Charles stared at it fixedly. The Seer was really beginning to produce an impression.

'Now, put it in that envelope,' the Seer exclaimed. Sir Charles, like a lamb, placed it as directed.

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The Seer strode forward. 'Give me the envelope,' he said. He took it in his hand, walked over towards the fireplace, and solemnly burnt it. 'See—it crumbles into ashes,' he cried. Then he came back to the middle of the room, close to the green light, rolled up his sleeve, and held his arm before Sir Charles. There, in blood-red letters, my brother-in-law read the name, 'Charles Vandrift', in his own handwriting!

'I see how that's done,' Sir Charles murmured, drawing back. 'It's a clever delusion; but still, I see through it. It's like that ghost-book. Your ink was deep green; your light was green; you made me look at it long; and then I saw the same thing written on the skin of your arm in complementary colours.'

'You think so?' the Seer replied, with a curious curl of the lip.

'I'm sure of it,' Sir Charles answered.

Quick as lightning the Seer rolled up his sleeve. 'That's your name,' he cried, in a very clear voice, 'but not your whole name. What do you say, then, to my right? Is this one also a complementary colour?' He held his other arm out. There, in sea-green letters, I read the name, 'Charles O'Sullivan Vandrift'. It is my brother-in-law's full baptismal designation; but he has dropped the O'Sullivan for many years past, and, to say the truth, doesn't like it. He is a little bit ashamed of his mother's family.

Charles glanced at it hurriedly. 'Quite right,' he said, 'quite right!' But his voice was hollow. I could guess he didn't care to continue the *séance*. He could see through the man, of course; but it was clear the fellow knew too much about us to be entirely pleasant.

'Turn up the lights,' I said, and a servant turned them. 'Shall I say coffee and benedictine?' I whispered to Vandrift.

'By all means,' he answered. 'Anything to keep this

fellow from further impertinences! And, I say, don't you think you'd better suggest at the same time that the men should smoke? Even these ladies are not above a cigarette—some of them.'

There was a sigh of relief. The lights burned brightly. The Seer for the moment retired from business, so to speak. He accepted a partaga with a very good grace, sipped his coffee in a corner, and chatted to the lady who had suggested Strafford with marked politeness. He was a polished gentleman.

Next morning, in the hall of the hotel, I saw Madame Picardet again, in a neat tailor-made travelling dress, evidently bound for the railway-station.

'What, off, Madame Picardet?' I cried.

She smiled, and held out her prettily-gloved hand. 'Yes, I'm off,' she answered archly. 'Florence, or Rome, or somewhere. I've drained Nice dry—like a sucked orange. Got all the fun I can out of it. Now I'm away again to my beloved Italy.'

But it struck me as odd that, if Italy was her game, she went by the omnibus which takes down to the *train de luxe* for Paris. However, a man of the world accepts what a lady tells him, no matter how improbable; and I confess, for ten days or so, I thought no more about her, or the Seer either.

At the end of that time our fortnightly pass-book came in from the bank in London. It is part of my duty, as the millionaire's secretary, to make up this book once a fortnight, and to compare the cancelled cheques with Sir Charles's counterfoils. On this particular occasion I happened to observe what I can only describe as a very grave discrepancy—in fact, a discrepancy of £5,000. On the wrong side, too. Sir Charles was debited with £5,000 more than the total amount that was shown on the counterfoils.

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I examined the book with care. The source of the error was obvious. It lay in a cheque to Self or Bearer, for £5,000, signed by Sir Charles, and evidently paid across the counter in London, as it bore on its face no stamp or indication of any other office.

I called in my brother-in-law from the salon to the study. 'Look here, Charles,' I said, 'there's a cheque in the book which you haven't entered.' And I handed it to him without comment, for I thought it might have been drawn to settle some little loss on the turf or at cards, or to make up some other affair he didn't desire to mention to me. These things will happen.

He looked at it and stared hard. Then he pursed up his mouth and gave a long low 'Whew!' At last he turned it over and remarked, 'I say, Sey, my boy, we've just been done jolly well brown, haven't we?'

I glanced at the cheque. 'How do you mean?' I inquired.

'Why, the Seer,' he replied, still staring at it ruefully. 'I don't mind the five thou., but to think the fellow should have gammoned the pair of us like that—ignominious, I call it!'

'How do you know it's the Seer?' I asked.

'Look at the green ink,' he answered. 'Besides, I recollect the very shape of the last flourish. I flourished a bit like that in the excitement of the moment, which I don't always do with my regular signature.'

'He's done us,' I answered, recognising it. 'But how the dickens did he manage to transfer it to the cheque? This looks like your own handwriting, Charles, not a clever forgery.'

'It is,' he said. 'I admit it—I can't deny it. Only fancy him bamboozling me when I was most on my guard! I wasn't to be taken in by any of his silly occult tricks and catch-words; but it never occurred to me he was going to victimize me financially in this way. I expected attempts at

a loan or an extortion; but to collar my signature to a blank cheque—atrocious!’

‘How did he manage it?’ I asked.

‘I haven’t the faintest conception. I only know those are the words I wrote. I could swear to them anywhere.’

‘Then you can’t protest the cheque?’

‘Unfortunately, no; it’s my own true signature.’

We went that afternoon without delay to see the Chief Commissary of Police at the office. He was a gentlemanly Frenchman, much less formal and red-tapey than usual, and he spoke excellent English with an American accent, having acted, in fact, as a detective in New York for about ten years in his early manhood.

‘I guess,’ he said slowly, after hearing our story, ‘you’ve been victimized right here by Colonel Clay, gentlemen.’

‘Who is Colonel Clay?’ Sir Charles asked.

‘That’s just what I want to know,’ the Commissary answered, in his curious American-French-English. ‘He is a Colonel, because he occasionally gives himself a commission; he is called Colonel Clay, because he appears to possess an india-rubber face, and he can mould it like clay in the hands of the potter. Real name, unknown. Nationality, equally French and English. Address, usually Europe. Profession, former maker of wax figures to the Musée Grévin. Age, what he chooses. Employs his knowledge to mould his own nose and cheeks, with wax additions, to the character he desires to personate. Aquiline this time, you say. *Hein!* Anything like these photographs?’

He rummaged in his desk and handed us two.

‘Not in the least,’ Sir Charles answered. ‘Except, perhaps, as to the neck, everything here is quite unlike him.’

‘Then that’s the Colonel!’ the Commissary answered, with decision, rubbing his hands in glee. ‘Look here,’ and he took out a pencil and rapidly sketched the outline of one of the two faces—that of a bland-looking young man, with no

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expression worth mentioning. 'There's the Colonel in his simple disguise. Very good. Now watch me: figure to yourself that he adds here a tiny patch of wax to his nose—an aquiline bridge—just so; well, you have him right there; and the chin, ah, one touch: now, for hair, a wig: for complexion, nothing easier: that's the profile of your rascal, isn't it?'

'Exactly,' we both murmured. By two curves of the pencil, and a shock of false hair, the face was transmuted.

'He had very large eyes, with very big pupils; though,' I objected, looking close; 'and the man in the photograph here has them small and boiled-fishy.'

'That's so,' the Commissary answered. 'A drop of belladonna expands—and produces the Seer; five grains of opium contract—and give a dead-alive, stupidly-innocent appearance. Well, you leave this affair to me, gentlemen. I'll see the fun out. I don't say I'll catch him for you; nobody ever yet has caught Colonel Clay; but I'll explain how he did the trick; and that ought to be consolation enough to a man of your means for a trifle of five thousand!'

'You are not the conventional French office-holder, M. le Commissaire,' I ventured to interpose.

'You bet!' the Commissary replied, and drew himself up like a captain of infantry. 'Messieurs,' he continued, in French, with the utmost dignity, 'I shall devote the resources of this office to tracing out the crime, and, if possible, to effectuating the arrest of the culpable.'

We telegraphed to London, of course, and we wrote to the bank, with a full description of the suspected person. But I need hardly add that nothing came of it.

Three days later the Commissary called at our hotel. 'Well, gentlemen,' he said, 'I am glad to say I have discovered everything!'

'What? Arrested the Seer?' Sir Charles cried.

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The Commissary drew back, almost horrified at the suggestion.

'Arrested Colonel Clay?' he exclaimed. '*Mais, monsieur*, we are only human! Arrested him? No, not quite. But tracked out how he did it. That is already much—to unravel Colonel Clay, gentlemen!'

'Well, what do you make of it?' Sir Charles asked, crestfallen.

The Commissary sat down and gloated over his discovery. It was clear a well-planned crime amused him vastly. 'In the first place, monsieur,' he said, 'disabuse your mind of the idea that when monsieur your secretary went out to fetch Señor Herrera that night, Señor Herrera didn't know to whose rooms he was coming. Quite otherwise, in point of fact. I do not doubt myself that Señor Herrera, or Colonel Clay (call him which you like), came to Nice this winter for no other purpose than just to rob you.'

'But I sent for him,' my brother-in-law interposed.

'Yes; he *meant* you to send for him. He forced a card, so to speak. If he couldn't do that I guess he would be a pretty poor conjurer. He had a lady of his own—his wife, let us say, or his sister—stopping here at this hotel; a certain Madame Picardet. Through her he induced several ladies of your circle to attend his *séances*. She and they spoke to you about him, and aroused your curiosity. You may bet your bottom dollar that when he came to this room he came ready primed and prepared with endless facts about both of you.'

'What fools we have been, Sey,' my brother-in-law exclaimed. 'I see it all now. That designing woman sent round before dinner to say I wanted to meet him; and by the time you got there he was ready for bamboozling me.'

'That's so,' the Commissary answered. 'He had your name ready painted on both his arms; and he had made other preparations of still greater importance.'

'You mean the cheque. Well, how did he get it?'

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The Commissary opened the door. 'Come in,' he said. And a young man entered whom we recognized at once as the chief clerk in the Foreign Department of the *Crédit Marseillais*, the principal bank all along the Riviera.

'State what you know of this cheque,' the Commissary said, showing it to him, for we had handed it over to the police as a piece of evidence.

'About four weeks since—' the clerk began.

'Say ten days before your *séance*,' the Commissary interposed.

'A gentleman with very long hair and an aquiline nose, dark, strange, and handsome, called in at my department and asked if I could tell him the name of Sir Charles Vandrift's London banker. He said he had a sum to pay in to your credit, and asked if we would forward it for him. I told him it was irregular for us to receive the money, as you had no account with us, but that your London bankers were Darby, Drummond, and Rothenberg, Limited.'

'Quite right,' Sir Charles murmured.

'Two days later a lady, Madame Picardet, who was a customer of ours, brought in a good cheque for three hundred pounds, signed by a first-rate name, and asked us to pay it in on her behalf to Darby, Drummond, and Rothenberg's, and to open a London account with them for her. We did so, and received in reply a cheque-book.'

'From which this cheque was taken, as I learn from the number, by telegram from London,' the Commissary put in. 'Also, that on the same day on which your cheque was cashed, Madame Picardet, in London, withdrew her balance.'

'But how did the fellow get me to sign the cheque?' Sir Charles cried. 'How did he manage the card trick?'

The Commissary produced a similar card from his pocket. 'Was that the sort of thing?' he asked.

'Precisely! A facsimile.'

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'I thought so. Well, our Colonel, I find, bought a packet of such cards, intended for admission to a religious function, at a shop in the Quai Masséna. He cut out the centre, and, see here—' The Commissary turned it over, and showed a piece of paper pasted neatly over the back; this he tore off, and there, concealed behind it, lay a folded cheque, with only the place where the signature should be written showing through on the face which the Seer had presented to us. 'I call that a neat trick,' the Commissary remarked, with professional enjoyment of a really good deception.

'But he burnt the envelope before my eyes,' Sir Charles exclaimed.

'Pooh!' the Commissary answered. 'What would he be worth as a conjurer, anyway, if he couldn't substitute one envelope for another between the table and the fireplace without your noticing it? And Colonel Clay, you must remember, is a prince among conjurers.'

'Well, it's a comfort to know we've identified our man, and the woman who was with him,' Sir Charles said, with a slight sigh of relief. 'The next thing will be, of course, you'll follow them up on these clues in England and arrest them?'

The Commissary shrugged his shoulders. 'Arrest them!' he exclaimed, much amused. 'Ah, monsieur, but you are sanguine! No officer of justice has ever succeeded in arresting le Colonel Caoutchouc, as we call him in French. He is as slippery as an eel, that man. He wriggles through our fingers. Suppose even we caught him, what could we prove? I ask you. Nobody who has seen him once can ever swear to him again in his next impersonation. He is *impayable*, this good Colonel. On the day when I arrest him, I assure you, monsieur, I shall consider myself the smartest police-officer in Europe.'

'Well, I shall catch him yet,' Sir Charles answered, and relapsed into silence.

II

The Episode of the Diamond Links

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‘Let us take a trip to Switzerland,’ said Lady Vandrift. And any one who knows Amelia will not be surprised to learn that we *did* take a trip to Switzerland accordingly. Nobody can drive Sir Charles, except his wife. And nobody at all can drive Amelia.

There were difficulties at the outset, because we had not ordered rooms at the hotels beforehand, and it was well on in the season; but they were overcome at last by the usual application of a golden key; and we found ourselves in due time pleasantly quartered in Lucerne, at that most comfortable of European hostelries, the Schweiizerhof.

We were a square party of four—Sir Charles and Amelia, myself and Isabel. We had nice big rooms, on the first floor, overlooking the lake; and as none of us was possessed with the faintest symptom of that incipient mania which shows itself in the form of an insane desire to climb mountain heights of disagreeable steepness and unnecessary snowiness, I will venture to assert we all enjoyed ourselves. We spent most of our time sensibly in lounging about the lake

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on the jolly little steamers; and when we did a mountain climb, it was on the Rigi or Pilatus—where an engine undertook all the muscular work for us.

As usual, at the hotel, a great many miscellaneous people showed a burning desire to be specially nice to us. If you wish to see how friendly and charming humanity is, just try being a well-known millionaire for a week, and you'll learn a thing or two. Wherever Sir Charles goes he is surrounded by charming and disinterested people, all eager to make his distinguished acquaintance, and all familiar with several excellent investments, or several deserving objects of Christian charity. It is my business in life, as his brother-in-law and secretary, to decline with thanks the excellent investments, and to throw judicious cold water on the objects of charity. Even I myself, as the great man's almoner, am very much sought after. People casually allude before me to artless stories of 'poor curates in Cumberland, you know, Mr Wentworth,' or widows in Cornwall, penniless poets with epics in their desks, and young painters who need but the breath of a patron to open to them the doors of an admiring Academy. I smile and look wise, while I administer cold water in minute doses; but I never report one of these cases to Sir Charles, except in the rare or almost unheard-of event where I think there is really something in them.

Ever since our little adventure with the Seer at Nice, Sir Charles, who is constitutionally cautious, had been even more careful than usual about possible sharpers. And, as chance would have it, there sat just opposite us at *table d'hôte* at the Schweitzerhof—'tis a fad of Amelia's to dine at *table d'hôte*; she says she can't bear to be boxed up all day in private rooms with 'too much family'—a sinister-looking man with dark hair and eyes, conspicuous by his bushy overhanging eyebrows. My attention was first called to the eyebrows in question by a nice little parson who sat at our side, and who observed that they were made up of certain

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large and bristly hairs, which (he told us) had been traced by Darwin to our monkey ancestors. Very pleasant little fellow, this fresh-faced young parson, on his honeymoon tour with a nice wee wife, a bonnie Scotch lassie with a charming accent.

I looked at the eyebrows close. Then a sudden thought struck me. 'Do you believe they're his own?' I asked of the curate; 'or are they only stuck on—a make-up disguise? They really almost look like it.'

'You don't suppose—' Charles began, and checked himself suddenly.

'Yes, I do,' I answered; 'the Seer!' Then I recollected my blunder, and looked down sheepishly. For, to say the truth, Vandrift had straightly enjoined on me long before to say nothing of our painful little episode at Nice to Amelia; he was afraid if *she* once heard of it, *he* would hear of it for ever after.

'What Seer?' the little parson inquired, with parsonical curiosity.

I noticed the man with the overhanging eyebrows give a queer sort of start. Charles's glance was fixed upon me. I hardly knew what to answer.

'Oh, a man who was at Nice with us last year,' I stammered out, trying hard to look unconcerned. 'A fellow they talked about, that's all.' And I turned the subject.

But the curate, like a donkey, wouldn't let me turn it.

'Had he eyebrows like that?' he inquired, in an undertone. I was really angry. If this *was* Colonel Clay, the curate was obviously giving him the cue, and making it much more difficult for us to catch him, now we might possibly have lighted on the chance to do so.

'No, he hadn't,' I answered testily; 'it was a passing expression. But this is not the man. I was mistaken, no doubt.' And I nudged him gently.

The little curate was too innocent for anything. 'Oh, I

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see,' he replied, nodding hard and looking wise. Then he turned to his wife and made an obvious face, which the man with the eyebrows couldn't fail to notice.

Fortunately, a political discussion going on a few places farther down the table spread up to us and diverted attention for a moment. The magical name of Gladstone saved us. Sir Charles flared up. I was truly pleased, for I could see Amelia was boiling over with curiosity by this time.

After dinner, in the billiard-room, however, the man with the big eyebrows sidled up and began to talk to me. If he *was* Colonel Clay, it was evident he bore us no grudge at all for the five thousand pounds he had done us out of. On the contrary, he seemed quite prepared to do us out of five thousand more when opportunity offered; for he introduced himself at once as Dr Hector Macpherson, the exclusive grantee of extensive concessions from the Brazilian Government on the Upper Amazons. He dived into conversation with me at once as to the splendid mineral resources of his Brazilian estate—the silver, the platinum, the actual rubies, the possible diamonds. I listened and smiled; I knew what was coming. All he needed to develop this magnificent concession was a little more capital. It was sad to see thousands of pounds' worth of platinum and car-loads of rubies just crumbling in the soil or carried away by the river, for want of a few hundreds to work them with properly. If he knew of anybody, now, with money to invest, he could recommend him—nay, offer him—a unique opportunity of earning, say, forty per cent on his capital, on unimpeachable security.

'I wouldn't do it for every man,' Dr Hector Macpherson remarked, drawing himself up; 'but if I took a fancy to a fellow who had command of ready cash, I might choose to put him in the way of feathering his nest with unexampled rapidity.'

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'Exceedingly disinterested of you,' I answered drily, fixing my eyes on his eyebrows.

The little curate, meanwhile, was playing billiards with Sir Charles. His glance followed mine as it rested for a moment on the monkey-like hairs.

'False, obviously false,' he remarked with his lips; and I'm bound to confess I never saw any man speak so well by movement alone; you could follow every word though not a sound escaped him.

During the rest of that evening Dr Hector Macpherson stuck to me as close as a mustard-plaster. And he was almost as irritating. I got heartily sick of the Upper Amazons. I have positively waded in my time through ruby mines (in prospectuses, I mean) till the mere sight of a ruby absolutely sickens me. When Charles, in an unwonted fit of generosity, once gave his sister Isabel (whom I had the honour to marry) a ruby necklet (inferior stones), I made Isabel change it for sapphires and amethysts, on the judicious plea that they suited her complexion better. (I scored one, incidentally, for having considered Isabel's complexion). By the time I went to bed I was prepared to sink the Upper Amazons in the sea, and to stab, shoot, poison, or otherwise seriously damage the man with the concession and the false eyebrows.

For the next three days, at intervals, he returned to the charge. He bored me to death with his platinum and his rubies. He didn't want a capitalist who would personally exploit the thing; he would prefer to do it all on his own account, giving the capitalist preference debentures of his bogus company, and a lien on the concession. I listened and smiled; I listened and yawned; I listened and was rude; I ceased to listen at all; but still he droned on with it. I fell asleep on the steamer one day, and woke up in ten minutes to hear him droning yet, 'And the yield of platinum per ton was certified to be—' I forget how many pounds, or ounces,

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or pennyweights. These details of assays have ceased to interest me: like the man who 'didn't believe in ghosts', I have seen too many of them.

The fresh-faced little curate and his wife, however, were quite different people. He was a cricketing Oxford man; she was a breezy Scotch lass, with a wholesome breath of the Highlands about her. I called her 'White Heather'. Their name was Brabazon. Millionaires are so accustomed to being beset by harpies of every description, that when they come across a young couple who are simple and natural, they delight in the purely human relation. We picnicked and went excursions a great deal with the honeymooners. They were frank in their young love, and so proof against chaff, that we all really liked them. But whenever I called the pretty girl 'White Heather', she looked so shocked, and cried: 'Oh, Mr Wentworth!' Still, we were the best of friends. The curate offered to row us in a boat on the lake one day, while the Scotch lassie assured us she could take an oar almost as well as he did. However, we did not accept their offer, as row-boats exert an unfavourable influence upon Amelia's digestive organs.

'Nice young fellow, that man Brabazon,' Sir Charles said to me one day, as we lounged together along the quay; 'never talks about advowsons or next presentations. Doesn't seem to me to care two pins about promotion. Says he's quite content in his country curacy; enough to live upon, and needs no more; and his wife has a little, a very little, money. I asked him about his poor to-day, on purpose to test him: these parsons are always trying to screw something out of one for their poor; men in my position know the truth of the saying that we have that class of the population always with us. Would you believe it, he says he hasn't any poor at all in his parish! They're all well-to-do farmers or else able-bodied labourers, and his one terror is that somebody will come and try to pauperise them. 'If a philanthro-

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pist were to give me fifty pounds to-day for use at Empingham,' he said, 'I assure you, Sir Charles, I shouldn't know what to do with it. I think I should buy new dresses for Jessie, who wants them about as much as anybody else in the village—that is to say, not at all.' 'There's a parson for you, Sey, my boy. Only wish we had one of his sort at Seldon.'

'He certainly doesn't want to get anything out of you,' I answered.

That evening at dinner a queer little episode happened. The man with the eyebrows began talking to me across the table in his usual fashion, full of his wearisome concession on the Upper Amazons. I was trying to squash him as politely as possible, when I caught Amelia's eye. Her look amused me. She was engaged in making signals to Charles at her side to observe the little curate's curious sleeve-links. I glanced at them, and saw at once they were a singular possession for so unobtrusive a person. They consisted each of a short gold bar for one arm of the link, fastened by a tiny chain of the same material to what seemed to my tolerably experienced eye—a first-rate diamond. Pretty big diamonds, too, and of remarkable shape, brilliancy, and cutting. In a moment I knew what Amelia meant. She owned a diamond *rivière*, said to be of Indian origin, but short by two stones for the circumference of her tolerably ample neck. Now, she had long been wanting two diamonds like these to match her set; but owing to the unusual shape and antiquated cutting of her own gems, she had never been able to complete the necklet, at least without removing an extravagant amount from a much larger stone of the first water.

The Scotch lassie's eyes caught Amelia's at the same time, and she broke into a pretty smile of good-humoured amusement. 'Taken in another person, Dick, dear!' she exclaimed, in her breezy way, turning to her husband. 'Lady Vandrift is observing your diamond sleeve-links.'

'They're very fine gems,' Amelia observed incautiously. (A most unwise admission if she desired to buy them.)

But the pleasant little curate was too transparently simple a soul to take advantage of her slip of judgment. 'They are good stones,' he replied; 'very good stones—considering. They're not diamonds at all, to tell you the truth. They're best old-fashioned Oriental paste. My great-grandfather bought them, after the siege of Seringapatam, for a few rupees, from a Sepoy who had looted them from Tippoo Sultan's palace. He thought, like you, he had got a good thing. But it turned out, when they came to be examined by experts, they were only paste—very wonderful paste; it is supposed they had even imposed upon Tippoo himself, so fine is the imitation. But they are worth—well, say, fifty shillings at the utmost.'

While he spoke Charles looked at Amelia, and Amelia looked at Charles. Their eyes spoke volumes. The *rivière* was also supposed to have come from Tippoo's collection. Both drew at once an identical conclusion. These were two of the same stones, very likely torn apart and disengaged from the rest in the *mêlée* at the capture of the Indian palace.

'Can you take them off?' Sir Charles asked blandly. He spoke in the tone that indicates business.

'Certainly,' the little curate answered, smiling. 'I'm accustomed to taking them off. They're always noticed. They've been kept in the family ever since the siege, as a sort of valueless heirloom, for the sake of the picturesqueness of the story, you know; and nobody ever sees them without asking, as you do, to examine them closely. They deceive even experts at first. But they're paste, all the same; unmitigated Oriental paste, for all that.'

He took them both off, and handed them to Charles. No man in England is a finer judge of gems than my brother-in-law. I watched him narrowly. He examined them close, first with the naked eye, then with the little pocket-lens which he

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always carries. 'Admirable imitation,' he muttered, passing them on to Amelia. 'I'm not surprised they should impose upon inexperienced observers.'

But from the tone in which he said, it, I could see at once he had satisfied himself they were real gems of unusual value. I know Charles's way of doing business so well. His glance to Amelia meant, 'These are the very stones you have so long been in search of.'

The Scotch lassie laughed a merry laugh. 'He sees through them now, Dick,' she cried. 'I felt sure Sir Charles would be a judge of diamonds.'

Amelia turned them over. I know Amelia; too; and I knew from the way Amelia looked at them that she meant to have them. And when Amelia means to have anything, people who stand in the way may just as well spare themselves the trouble of opposing her.

They were beautiful diamonds. We found out afterwards the little curate's account was quite correct: these stones *had* come from the same necklet as Amelia's *rivière*, made for a favourite wife of Tippoo's who had presumably as expansive personal charms as our beloved sister-in-law's. More perfect diamonds have seldom been seen. They have excited the universal admiration of thieves and *coûmisseurs*. Amelia told me afterwards that, according to legend, a Sepoy stole the necklet at the sack of the palace, and then fought with another for it. It was believed that the stones got spilt in the scuffle, and were picked up and sold by a third person—a looker-on—who had no idea of the value of his booty. Amelia had been hunting for them for several years to complete her necklet.

'They are excellent paste,' Sir Charles observed, handing them back. 'It takes a first-rate judge to detect them from the reality. Lady Vandrift has a necklet much the same in character, but composed of genuine stones; and as these are so much like them, and would complete her set, to all

outer appearance, I wouldn't mind giving you, say, £10 for the pair of them.'

Mrs Brabazon looked delighted. 'Oh, sell them to him, Dick,' she cried, 'and buy me a brooch with the money! A pair of common links would do for you just as well. Ten pounds for two paste stones! It's quite a lot of money.'

She said it so sweetly, with her pretty Scotch accent, that I couldn't imagine how Dick had the heart to refuse her. But he did, all the same.

'No, Jess, darling,' he answered. 'They're worthless, I know; but they have for me a certain sentimental value, as I've often told you. My dear mother wore them, while she lived, as ear-rings; and as soon as she died I had them set as links in order that I might always keep them about me. Besides, they have historical and family interest. Even a worthless heirloom, after all, *is* an heirloom.'

Dr Hector Macpherson looked across and intervened. 'There is a part of my concession,' he said, 'where we have reason to believe a perfect new Kimberley will soon be discovered. If at any time you would care, Sir Charles, to look at my diamonds—when I get them—it would afford me the greatest pleasure in life to submit them to your consideration.'

Sir Charles could stand it no longer. 'Sir,' he said, gazing across at him with his sternest air, 'if your concession were as full of diamonds as Sindbad the Sailor's valley, I would not care to turn my head to look at them. I am acquainted with the nature and practice of salting.' And he glared at the man with the overhanging eyebrows as if he would devour him raw. Poor Dr Hector Macpherson subsided instantly. We learnt a little later that he was a harmless lunatic, who went about the world with successive concessions for ruby mines and platinum reefs, because he had been ruined and driven mad by speculations in the two, and now recouped himself by imaginary grants in Burmah and

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Brazil, or anywhere else that turned up handy. And his eyebrows, after all, were of Nature's handicraft. We were sorry for the incident; but a man in Sir Charles's position is such a mark for rogues that, if he did not take means to protect himself promptly, he would be for ever overrun by them.

When we went up to our *salon* that evening, Amelia flung herself on the sofa. 'Charles,' she broke out in the voice of a tragedy queen, 'those are real diamonds, and I shall never be happy again till I get them.'

'They are real diamonds,' Charles echoed. 'And you shall have them, Amelia. They're worth not less than three thousand pounds. But I shall bid them up gently.'

So, next day, Charles set to work to higgler with the curate. Brabazon, however, didn't care to part with them. He was no money-grubber, he said. He cared more for his mother's gift and a family tradition than for a hundred pounds, if Sir Charles were to offer it. Charles's eye gleamed. 'But if I give you *two* hundred!' he said insinuatingly. 'What opportunities for good! You could build a new wing to your village school-house!'

'We have ample accommodation,' the curate answered. 'No, I don't think I'll sell them.'

Still, his voice faltered somewhat, and he looked down at them inquiringly.

Charles was too precipitate.

'A hundred pounds more or less matters little to me,' he said; 'and my wife has set her heart on them. It's every man's duty to please his wife—isn't it, Mrs Brabazon?—I offer you three hundred.'

The little Scotch girl clasped her hands.

'Three hundred pounds! Oh, Dick, just think what fun we could have, and what good we could do with it! Do let him have them.'

Her accent was irresistible. But the curate shook his head.

'Impossible,' he answered. 'My dear mother's ear-rings! Uncle Aubrey would be so angry if he knew I'd sold them. I daren't face Uncle Aubrey.'

'Has he expectations from Uncle Aubrey?' Sir Charles asked of White Heather.

Mrs Brabazon laughed. 'Uncle Aubrey! Oh, dear, no. Poor dear old Uncle Aubrey! Why, the darling old soul hasn't a penny to bless himself with, except his pension. He's a retired post captain.' And she laughed melodiously. She was a charming woman.

‘Then I should disregard Uncle Aubrey’s feelings,’ Sir Charles said decisively.

'No, no,' the curate answered. 'Poor dear old Uncle Aubrey! I wouldn't do anything for the world to annoy him. And he'd be sure to notice it.'

We went back to Amelia. 'Well, have you got them?' she asked.

'No,' Sir Charles answered. 'Not yet. But he's coming round, I think. He's hesitating now. Would rather like to sell them himself, but is afraid what "Uncle Aubrey" would say about the matter. His wife will talk him out of his needless considerations for Uncle Aubrey's feelings; and tomorrow we'll finally clench the bargain.'

Next morning we stayed late in our *salon*, where we always breakfasted, and did not come down to the public rooms till just before *déjeuner*, Sir Charles being busy with me over arrears of correspondence. When we *did* come down the *concierge* stepped forward with a twisted little feminine note for Amelia. She took it and read it. Her countenance

There, Charles,' she cried, handing it to him, 'you've from the
ance slip. I shall *never* be happy now! They've gone with the diamonds.'

The Episode of the Diamond Links

Charles seized the note and read it. Then he passed it on to me. It was short, but final:

Thursday, 6 a.m.

DEAR LADY VANDRIFT—Will you kindly excuse our having gone off hurriedly without bidding you good-bye? We have just had a horrid telegram to say that Dick's favourite sister is *dangerously* ill of fever in Paris. I wanted to shake hands with you before we left—you have all been so sweet to us—but we go by the morning train, absurdly early, and I wouldn't for worlds disturb you. Perhaps some day we may meet again—though, buried as we are in a North-country village, it isn't likely; but in any case, you have secured the grateful recollection of Yours very cordially,

JESSIE BRABAZON

P.S.—Kindest regards to Sir Charles and those *dear* Wentworths, and a kiss for yourself, if I may venture to send you one.

'She doesn't even mention where they've gone,' Amelia exclaimed, in a very bad humour.

'The *concierge* may know,' Isabel suggested, looking over my shoulder.

We asked at his office.

Yes, the gentleman's address was the Rev. Richard Peploe Brabazon, Holme Bush Cottage, Empingham, Northumberland.

Any address where letters might be sent at once, in Paris?

For the next ten days, or till further notice, Hotel des Deux Mondes, Avenue de l'Opéra.

Amelia's mind was made up at once.

'Strike while the iron's hot,' she cried. 'This sudden illness, coming at the end of their honeymoon, and *in* ten days' more stay at an expensive hotel, will *eat* fun up the curate's budget. He'll be glad to sell now! You'll get them for three hundred. It was absurd of Charles to

offer so much at first; but offered once, of course we must stick to it.'

'What do you propose to do?' Charles asked. 'Write, or telegraph?'

'Oh, how silly men are!' Amelia cried. 'Is this the sort of business to be arranged by letter, still less by telegram? No. Seymour must start off at once, taking the night train to Paris; and the moment he gets there, he must interview the curate or Mrs Brabazon. Mrs Brabazon's the best. She has none of this stupid, sentimental nonsense about Uncle Aubrey.'

It is no part of a secretary's duties to act as a diamond broker. But when Amelia puts her foot down, she puts her foot down—a fact which she is unnecessarily fond of emphasizing in that identical proposition. So the self-same evening saw me safe in the train on my way to Paris; and next morning I turned out of my comfortable sleeping-car at the Gare de Strasbourg. My orders were to bring back those diamonds, alive or dead, so to speak, in my pocket to Lucerne; and to offer any needful sum, up to two thousand five hundred pounds, for their immediate purchase.

When I arrived at the Deux Mondes I found the poor little curate and his wife both greatly agitated. They had sat up all night, they said, with their invalid sister; and the sleeplessness and suspense had certainly told upon them after their long railway journey. They were pale and tired, Mrs Brabazon, in particular, looking ill and worried—too much like White Heather. I was more than half ashamed of bothering them about the diamonds at such a moment, but it occurred to me that Amelia was probably right—they would now have reached the end of the sum set apart for their Continental trip, and a little ready cash might be far from unwelcome.

I broached the subject delicately. It was a fad of Lady Vandrift's, I said. She had set her heart upon those useless

The Episode of the Diamond Links

trinkets. And she wouldn't go without them. She must and would have them. But the curate was obdurate. He threw Uncle Aubrey still in my teeth. Three hundred?—no, never! A mother's present; impossible, dear Jessie! Jessie begged and prayed; she had grown really attached to Lady Vandrift, she said; but the curate wouldn't hear of it. I went up tentatively to four hundred. He shook his head gloomily. It wasn't a question of money, he said. It was a question of affection. I saw it was no use trying that tack any longer. I struck out a new line. 'These stones,' I said, 'I think I ought to inform you, are really diamonds. Sir Charles is certain of it. Now, is it right for a man of your profession and position to be wearing a pair of big gems like those, worth several hundred pounds, as ordinary sleeve-links? A woman?—yes, I grant you. But for a man, is it manly? And you a cricketer!'

He looked at me and laughed. 'Will nothing convince you?' he cried. 'They have been examined and tested by half a dozen jewellers, and we know them to be paste. It wouldn't be right of me to sell them to you under false pretences, however unwilling on my side. I *couldn't* do it.'

'Well, then,' I said, going up a bit in my bids to meet him, 'I'll put it like this. These gems are paste. But Lady Vandrift has an unconquerable and unaccountable desire to possess them. Money doesn't matter to her. She is a friend of your wife's. As a personal favour, won't you sell them to her for a thousand?'

He shook his head. 'It would be wrong,' he said,—'I might even add, criminal.'

'But we take all risk,' I cried.

He was absolute adamant. 'As a clergyman,' he answered, 'I feel I cannot do it.'

'Will *you* try, Mrs Brabazon?' I asked.

The pretty little Scotchwoman leant over and whispered.

She coaxed and cajoled him. Her ways were winsome. I couldn't hear what she said, but he seemed to give way at last. 'I should love Lady Vandrift to have them,' she murmured turning to me. 'She is such a dear!' And she took out the links from her husband's cuffs and handed them across to me.

'How much?' I asked.

'Two thousand?' she answered interrogatively. It was a big rise, all at once; but such are the ways of women.

'Done!' I replied. 'Do you consent?'

The curate looked up as if ashamed of himself.

'I consent,' he said slowly, 'since Jessie wishes it. But as a clergyman, and to prevent any future misunderstanding, I should like you to give me a statement in writing that you buy them on my distinct and positive declaration that they are made of paste—old Oriental paste—not genuine stones, and that I do not claim any other qualities for them.'

I popped the gems into my purse, well pleased.

'Certainly,' I said, pulling out a paper. Charles, with his unerring business instinct, had anticipated the request, and given me a signed agreement to that effect.

'You will take a cheque?' I inquired.

He hesitated.

'Notes of the Bank of France would suit me better,' he answered.

'Very well,' I replied. 'I will go out and get them.'

How very unsuspecting some are! He allowed me to go off—with the stones in my pocket!

Sir Charles had given me a blank cheque, not exceeding two thousand five hundred pounds. I took it to our agents and cashed it for notes of the Bank of France. The curate clasped them with pleasure. And right glad I was to go back to Lucerne that night, feeling that I had got those diamonds into my hands for about a thousand pounds under their real value!

The Episode of the Diamond Links

'That's the question,' Charles answered. 'You *do* leave it about so!'

'And why didn't he steal the whole *rivière* at once, and sell the gems?' I inquired.

'Too cunning,' Charles replied. 'This was much better business. It isn't easy to dispose of a big thing like that. In the first place, the stones are large and valuable; in the second place, they're well known—every dealer has heard of the Vandrift *rivière*, and seen pictures of the shape of them. They're marked gems, so to speak. No, he played a better game—took a couple of them off, and offered them to the only person on earth who was likely to buy them without suspicion. He came here, meaning to work this very trick; he had the links made right to the shape beforehand, and then he stole the stones and slipped them into their places. It's a wonderfully clever trick. Upon my soul, I almost admire the fellow.'

For Charles is a business man himself, and can appreciate business capacity in others.

How Colonel Clay came to know about that necklet, and to appropriate two of the stones, we only discovered much later. I will not here anticipate that disclosure. One thing at a time is a good rule in life. For the moment he succeeded in baffling us altogether.

However, we followed him on to Paris, telegraphing beforehand to the Bank of France to stop the notes. It was all in vain. They had been cashed within half an hour of my paying them. The curate and his wife, we found, quitted the Hotel des Deux Mondes for parts unknown that same afternoon. And, as usual with Colonel Clay, they vanished into space, leaving no clue behind them. In other words, they changed their disguise, no doubt, and reappeared somewhere else that night in altered characters. At any rate, no such person as the Reverend Richard Peploe Brabazon was ever afterwards heard of—

and, for the matter of that no such village exists as Empingham, Northumberland.

We communicated the matter to the Parisian police. They were *most* unsympathetic. 'It is no doubt Colonel Clay,' said the official whom we saw; 'but you seem to have little just ground of complaint against him. As far as I can see messieurs, there is not much to choose between you. You, Monsieur le Chevalier, desired to buy diamonds at the price of paste. You, madame, feared you had bought paste at the price of diamonds. You, monsieur the secretary, tried to get the stones from an unsuspecting person for half their value. He took you all in, that brave Colonel Caoutchouc—it was diamond cut diamond.'

Which was true, no doubt, but by no means consoling.

We returned to the Grand Hotel. Charles was fuming with indignation. 'This is really too much,' he exclaimed. 'What an audacious rascal! But he will never again take me in, my dear Sey. I only hope he'll try it on. I should love to catch him. I'd know him another time, I'm sure, in spite of his disguises. It's absurd my being tricked twice running like this. But never again while I live! Never again, I declare to you!'

'*Jamais de la vie!*' a courier in the hall close by murmured responsively. We stood under the verandah of the Grand Hotel, in the big glass courtyard. And I verily believe that courier was really Colonel Clay himself in one of his disguises.

But perhaps we were beginning to suspect him everywhere.

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At Lucerne railway station Amelia met me. She was positively agitated.

'Have you brought them, Seymour?' she asked.

'Yes,' I answered, producing my spoils in triumph.

'Oh, how dreadful!' she cried, drawing back. 'Do you think they're real? Are you sure he hasn't cheated you?'

'Certain of it,' I replied, examining them. 'No one can take me in, in the matter of diamonds. Why on earth should you doubt them?'

'Because I've been talking to Mrs O'Hagan, at the hotel, and she says there's a well-known trick just like that—she's read of it in a book. A swindler has two sets—one real, one false; and he makes you buy the false ones by showing you the real, and pretending he sells them as a special favour.'

'You needn't be alarmed,' I answered. 'I am a judge of diamonds.'

'I shan't be satisfied,' Amelia murmured, 'till Charles has seen them.'

We went up to the hotel. For the first time in her life I saw Amelia really nervous as I handed the stones to Charles to examine. Her doubt was contagious. I half feared, myself, he might break out into a deep monosyllabic interjection, losing his temper in haste, as he often does when things go wrong. But he looked at them with a smile, while I told him the price.

'Eight hundred pounds less than their value,' he answered, well satisfied.

'You have no doubt of their reality?' I asked.

'Not the slightest,' he replied, gazing at them. 'They are genuine stones, precisely the same in quality and type as Amelia's necklet.'

Amelia drew a sigh of relief. 'I'll go upstairs,' she said slowly, 'and bring down my own for you both to compare with them.'

One minute later she rushed down again, breathless.

III

Five Hundred Carats

George Griffith

It was several months after the brilliant if somewhat mysterious recovery of the £15,000 parcel from the notorious but now vanished Seth Salter* that I had the pleasure, and I think I may fairly add the privilege, of making the acquaintance of Inspector Lipinzki.

I can say without hesitation that in the course of wanderings which have led me over a considerable portion of the lands and seas of the world I have never met a more interesting man than he was. I say 'was', poor fellow, for he is now no longer anything but a memory of bitterness to the I.D.B.—but that is a yarn with another twist.

There is no need for further explanation of the all too brief intimacy which followed our introduction, than the statement of the fact that the greatest South African detective of his day was after all a man as well as a detective, and hence not only justifiably proud of the many brilliant achievements which illustrated his career, but also by no means loth that some day the story of them should, with all due and proper precautions and reservations, be told to a

* The reference is to an earlier case of Inspector Lipinzki.

wider and possibly less prejudiced audience than the motley and migratory population of the Camp as it was in his day. I had not been five minutes in the cosy, tastily-furnished sanctum of his low, broad-roofed bungalow in New De Beers Road before I saw it was a museum as well as a study. Specimens of all sorts of queer apparatus employed by the I.D.B.'s for smuggling diamonds were scattered over the tables and mantelpiece.

There were massive, handsomely-carved briar and meerschaum pipes which seemed to hold wonderfully little tobacco for their size; rough sticks of firewood ingeniously hollowed out, which must have been worth a good round sum in their time; hollow handles of travelling trunks; ladies' boot heels of the fashion affected on a memorable occasion by Mrs Michael Mosenstein; and novels, hymn-books, church-services, and bibles, with cavities cut out of the centre of their leaves which had once held thousands of pounds' worth of illicit stones on their unsuspected passage through the book-post.

But none of these interested, or, indeed, puzzled me so much as did a couple of curiously assorted articles which lay under a little glass case on a wall bracket. One was an ordinary piece of heavy lead tubing, about three inches long and an inch in diameter, sealed by fusing at both ends, and having a little brass tap fused into one end. The other was a small ragged piece of dirty red sheet—indiarubber, very thin—in fact almost transparent—and, roughly speaking, four or five inches square.

I was looking at these things, wondering what on earth could be the connection between them, and what manner of strange story might be connected with them, when the Inspector came in.

'Good-evening. Glad to see you!' he said, in his quiet and almost gentle voice, and without a trace of foreign accent, as we shook hands. 'Well, what do you think of my

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'Good-evening. Glad to see you!' he said, in his quiet and almost gentle voice, and without a trace of foreign accent, as we shook hands. 'Well, what do you think of my

museum? I daresay you've guessed already that if some of these things could speak they could keep your readers entertained for some little time, eh?'

'Well, there is no reason why their owner shouldn't speak for them,' I said, making the obvious reply, 'provided always, of course, that it wouldn't be giving away too many secrets of state.'

'My dear sir,' he said, with a smile which curled up the ends of his little, black, carefully-trimmed moustache ever so slightly, 'I should not have made you the promise I did at the club the other night if I had not been prepared to rely absolutely on your discretion—and my own. Now, there's whiskey-and-soda or brandy; which do you prefer? You smoke, of course, and I think you'll find these pretty good, and that chair I can recommend. I have unravelled many a knotty problem in it, I can tell you.'

'And now,' he went on when we were at last comfortably settled, 'may I ask which of my relics has most aroused your professional curiosity?'

It was already on the tip of my tongue to ask for the story of the gas-pipe and piece of india-rubber, but the Inspector forestalled me by saying:

'But perhaps that is hardly a fair question, as they will all probably seem pretty strange to you. Now, for instance, I saw you looking at two of my curios when I came in. You would hardly expect them to be associated, and very intimately too, with about the most daring and skilfully planned diamond robbery that ever took place on the Fields, or off them, for the matter of that, would you?'

'Hardly,' I said. 'And yet I think I have learned enough of the devious ways of the I.D.B. to be prepared for a perfectly logical explanation of the fact.'

'As logical as I think I may fairly say romantic,' replied the Inspector as he set his glass down. 'In one sense it was the most ticklish problem that I've ever had to tackle. Of

George Griffith

course you've heard some version or other of the disappearance of the Great De Beers' Diamond?'

'I should rather think I had!' I said, with a decided thrill of pleasurable anticipation, for I felt sure that now, if ever, I was going to get to the bottom of the great mystery. 'Everybody in Camp seems to have a different version of it, and, of course, everyone seems to think that if he had only had the management of the case the mystery would have been solved long ago.'

'It is invariably the case,' said the Inspector, with another of his quiet, pleasant smiles, 'that everyone can do work better than those whose reputation depends upon the doing of it. We are not altogether fools at the Department, and yet I have to confess that I myself was in ignorance as to just how that diamond disappeared, or where it got to, until twelve hours ago.'

'Now, I am going to tell you the facts exactly as they are, but under the condition that you will alter all the names except, if you choose, my own, and that you will not publish the story for at least twelve months to come. There are personal and private reasons for this which you will probably understand without my stating them. Of course it will, in time, leak out into the papers, although there has been, and will be, no prosecution; but anything in the newspapers will of necessity be garbled and incorrect, and—well, I may as well confess that I am sufficiently vain to wish that my share in the transaction shall not be left altogether to the tender mercies of the imaginative penny-a-liner.'

I acknowledged the compliment with a bow as graceful as the easiness of the Inspector's chair would allow me to make, but I said nothing, as I wanted to get to the story.

'I had better begin at the beginning,' the Inspector went on, as he meditatively snipped the end of a fresh cigar. 'As I suppose you already know, the largest and most valuable diamond ever found on these fields was a really magnificent

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stone, a perfect octahedron, pure white, without a flaw, and weighing close on 500 carats. There's a photograph of it there on the mantelpiece. I've got another one by me; I'll give it you before you leave Kimberley.

'Well, this stone was found about six months ago in one of the drives on the 800-foot level of the Kimberley Mine. It was taken by the overseer straight to the De Beers' offices and placed on the Secretary's desk—you know where he sits, on the right hand side as you go into the Board Room through the green baize doors. There were several of the Directors present at the time, and, as you may imagine, they were pretty well pleased at the find, for the stone, without any exaggeration, was worth a prince's ransom.

'Of course, I needn't tell you that the value per carat of a diamond which is perfect and of a good colour increases in a sort of geometrical progression with the size. I dare-say that stone was worth anywhere between one and two millions, according to the depth of the purchaser's purse. It was worthy to adorn the proudest crown in the world instead of—but there, you'll think me a very poor story-teller if I anticipate.

'Well, the diamond, after being duly admired, was taken upstairs to the Diamond Room by the Secretary himself, accompanied by two of the Directors. Of course, you have been through the new offices of De Beers, but still, perhaps I had better just run over the ground, as the locality is rather important.

'You know that when you get upstairs and turn to the right on the landing from the top of the staircase there is a door with a little grille in it. You knock, a trap-door is raised and, if you are recognized and your business warrants it, you are admitted. Then you go along a little passage out of which a room opens on the left, and in front of you is another door leading into the Diamond Rooms themselves.

‘You know, too, that in the main room fronting Stockdale Street and Jones Street the diamond tables run round the two sides under the windows, and are railed off from the rest of the room by a single light wooden rail. There is a table in the middle of the room, and on your right hand as you go in there is a big safe standing against the wall. You will remember, too, that in the corner exactly facing the door stands the glass case containing the diamond scales. I want you particularly to recall the fact that these scales stand diagonally across the corner by the window. The secondary room, as you know, opens out on to the left, but that is not of much consequence.’

I signified my remembrance of these details and the Inspector went on.

‘The diamond was first put in the scale and weighed in the presence of the Secretary and the two Directors by one of the higher officials, a licensed diamond broker and a most trusted employee of De Beers, whom you may call Philip Marsden when you come to write the story. The weight, as I told you, in round figures was 500 carats. The stone was then photographed, partly for purposes of identification and partly as a reminder of the biggest stone ever found in Kimberley in its rough state.

‘The gem was then handed over to Mr Marsden’s care pending the departure of the Diamond Post to Vryburg on the following Monday—this was a Tuesday. The Secretary saw it locked up in the big safe by Mr Marsden, who, as usual, was accompanied by another official, a younger man than himself, whom you can call Henry Lomas, a connection of his, and also one of the most trusted members of the staff.

‘Every day, and sometimes two or three times a day, either the Secretary or one or other of the Directors came up and had a look at the big stone, either for their own satisfaction or to show it to some of their more intimate

friends. I ought, perhaps, to have told you before that the whole Diamond Room staff were practically sworn to secrecy on the subject, because, as you will readily understand, it was not considered desirable for such an exceedingly valuable find to be made public property in a place like this. When Saturday came it was decided not to send it down to Cape Town, for some reasons connected with the state of the market. When the safe was opened on Monday morning the stone was gone.

‘I needn’t attempt to describe the absolute panic which followed. It had been seen two or three times in the safe on the Saturday, and the Secretary himself was positive that it was there at closing time, because he saw it just as the safe was being locked for the night. In fact, he actually saw it put in, for it had been taken out to show to a friend of his a few minutes before.

‘The safe had not been tampered with, nor could it have been unlocked, because when it is closed for the night it cannot be opened again unless either the Secretary or the Managing Director is present, as they each have a master-key without which the key used during the day is of no use.

‘Of course I was sent for immediately, and I admit I was fairly staggered. If the Secretary had not been so positive that the stone was locked up when he saw the safe closed on the Saturday I should have worked upon the theory—the only possible one, as it seemed—that the stone had been abstracted from the safe during the day, concealed in the room, and somehow or other smuggled out, although even that would have been almost impossible in consequence of the strictness of the searching system and the almost certain discovery which must have followed an attempt to get it out of the town.

‘Both the rooms were searched in every nook and cranny. The whole staff, naturally feeling that every one of them must be suspected, immediately volunteered to submit to

any process of search that I might think satisfactory, and I can assure you the search was a very thorough one.

‘Nothing was found, and when we had done there wasn’t a scintilla of evidence to warrant us in suspecting anybody. It is true that the diamond was last actually seen by the Secretary in charge of Mr Marsden and Mr Lomas. Mr Marsden opened the safe, Mr Lomas put the tray containing the big stone and several other fine ones into its usual compartment, and the safe door was locked. Therefore that fact went for nothing.

‘You know, I suppose, that one of the Diamond Room staff always remains all night in the room; there is at least one night-watchman on every landing; and the frontages are patrolled all night by armed men of the special police. Lomas was on duty on the Saturday night. He was searched as usual when he came off duty on Sunday morning. Nothing was found, and I recognized that it was absolutely impossible that he could have brought the diamond out of the room or passed it to any confederate in the street without being discovered. Therefore, though at first sight suspicion might have pointed to him as being the one who was apparently last in the room with the diamond, there was absolutely no reason to connect that fact with its disappearance.’

‘I must say that that is a great deal plainer and more matter-of-fact than any of the other stories that I have heard of the mysterious disappearance,’ I said, as the Inspector paused to re-fill his glass and ask me to do likewise.

‘Yes,’ he said drily, ‘the truth is more commonplace up to a certain point than the sort of stories that a stranger will find floating about Kimberley, but still I daresay you have found in your own profession that it sometimes has a way of—to put it in sporting language—giving Fiction a seven-pound handicap and beating it in a canter.’

‘For my own part,’ I answered with an affirmative nod, ‘my money would go on Fact every time. Therefore it would go on now if I were betting. At any rate, I may say that none of the fiction that I have so far heard has offered even a reasonable explanation of the disappearance of that diamond, given the conditions which you have just stated, and, as far as I can see, I admit that I couldn’t give the remotest guess at the solution of the mystery.’

‘That’s exactly what I said to myself after I had been worrying day and night for more than a week over it,’ said the Inspector. ‘And then,’ he went on, suddenly getting up from his seat and beginning to walk up and down the room with quick, irregular strides, ‘all of a sudden in the middle of a very much smaller puzzle, just one of the common I.D.B. cases we have almost every week, the whole of the work that I was engaged upon vanished from my mind, leaving it for a moment a perfect blank. Then, like a lightning flash out of a black cloud, there came a momentary ray of light which showed me the clue to the mystery. That was the idea. These,’ he said, stopping in front of the mantelpiece and putting his finger on the glass case which covered the two relics that had started the story, ‘these were the materialization of it.’

‘And yet, my dear Inspector,’ I ventured to interrupt, ‘you will perhaps pardon me for saying that your ray of light leaves me just as much in the dark as ever.’

‘But your darkness shall be made day all in good course,’ he said with a smile. I could see that he had an eye for dramatic effect, and so I thought it was better to let him tell the story uninterrupted and in his own way, so I simply assured him of my ever-increasing interest and waited for him to go on. He took a couple of turns up and down the room in silence, as though he were considering in what form he should spring the solution of the mystery upon me, then he stopped and said abruptly:

‘I didn’t tell you that the next morning—that is to say, Sunday—Mr Marsden went out on horseback, shooting in the veld up towards that range of hills which lies over yonder to the north-westward between here and Barkly West. I can see by your face that you are already asking yourself what that has got to do with spiriting a million or so’s worth of crystallized carbon out of the safe at De Beers’. Well, a little patience, and you shall see.

‘Early that same Sunday morning, I was walking down Stockdale Street, in front of the De Beers’ offices, smoking a cigar, and, of course, worrying my brains about the diamond. I took a long draw at my weed, and quite involuntarily put my head back and blew it up into the air—there, just like that—and the cloud drifted diagonally across the street dead in the direction of the hills on which Mr Philip Marsden would just then be hunting buck. At the same instant the revelation which had scattered my thoughts about the other little case that I mentioned just now came back to me. I saw, with my mind’s eye, of course—well, now, what do you think I saw!’

‘If it wouldn’t spoil an incomparable detective,’ I said, somewhat irrelevantly, ‘I should say that you would make an excellent story-teller. Never mind what I think. I’m in the plastic condition just now. I am receiving impressions, not making them. Now, what did you see?’

‘I saw the Great De Beers’ Diamond—say from ten to fifteen hundred thousand pounds’ worth of concentrated capital—floating from the upper storey of the De Beers’ Consolidated Mines, rising over the housetops, and drifting down the wind to Mr Philip Marsden’s hunting-ground’

To say that I stared in the silence of blank amazement at the Inspector, who made this astounding assertion with a dramatic gesture and inflection which naturally cannot be reproduced in print, would be to utter the merest common-

place. He seemed to take my stare for one of incredulity rather than wonder, for he said almost sharply:

‘Ah, I see you are beginning to think that I am talking fiction now; but never mind, we will see about that later on. You have followed me, I have no doubt, closely enough to understand that, having exhausted all the resources of my experience and such native wit as the Fates have given me, and having made the most minute analysis of the circumstances of the case, I had come to the fixed conclusion that the great diamond had not been carried out of the room on the person of a human being, nor had it been dropped or thrown from the windows to the street—yet it was equally undeniable that it had got out of the safe and out of the room.’

‘And therefore it flew out, I suppose!’ I could not help interrupting, nor, I am afraid, could I quite avoid a suggestion of incredulity in my tone.

‘Yes, my dear sir!’ replied the Inspector, with an emphasis which he increased by slapping the four fingers of his right hand on the palm of his left. ‘Yes, it flew out. It flew some seventeen or eighteen miles before it returned to the earth in which it was born, if we may accept the theory of the terrestrial origin of diamonds. So far, as the event proved, I was absolutely correct, wild and all as you may naturally think my hypothesis to have been.

‘But,’ he continued, stopping in his walk and making an eloquent gesture of apology, ‘being only human, I almost instantly deviated from truth into error. In fact, I freely confess to you that there and then I made what I consider to be the greatest and most fatal mistake of my career.

‘Absolutely certain as I was that the diamond had been conveyed through the air to the Barkly Hills, and that Mr Philip Marsden’s shooting expedition had been undertaken with the object of recovering it, I had all the approaches to the town watched till he came back. He came in by the Old

Transvaal Road about an hour after dark. I had him arrested, took him into the house of one of my men who happened to live out that way, searched him, as I might say, from the roots of his hair to the soles of his feet, and found—nothing.

‘Of course he was indignant, and of course I looked a very considerable fool. In fact, nothing would pacify him but that I should meet him the next morning in the Board Room at De Beers’, and, in the presence of the Secretary and at least three Directors, apologise to him for my unfounded suspicions and the outrage that they had led me to make upon him. I was, of course, as you might say, between the devil and the deep sea. I had to do it, and I did it; but my convictions and my suspicions remained exactly what they were before.

‘Then there began a very strange, and, although you may think the term curious, a very pathetic, waiting game between us. He knew that in spite of his temporary victory I had really solved the mystery and was on the right track. I knew that the great diamond was out yonder somewhere among the hills or on the veld, and I knew, too, that he was only waiting for my vigilance to relax to go out and get it.

‘Day after day, week after week, and month after month the game went on in silence. We met almost every day. His credit had been completely restored at De Beers’. Lomas, his connection and, as I firmly believed, his confederate, had been, through his influence, sent on a mission to England, and when he went I confess to you that I thought the game was up—that Marsden had somehow managed to recover the diamond, and that Lomas had taken it beyond our reach.

‘Still I watched and waited, and as time went on I saw that my fears were groundless and that the gem was still on the veld or in the hills. He kept up bravely for weeks, but at last the strain began to tell upon him. Picture to yourself

Five Hundred Carats

“It was not locked up in the safe at all that night,” he answered, smiling with a sort of ghastly satisfaction. “Lomas and I, as you know, took the tray of diamonds to the safe, and, as far as the Secretary could see, put them in, but as he put the tray into its compartment he palmed the big diamond as I had taught him to do in a good many lessons before. At the moment that I shut the safe and locked it, the diamond was in his pocket.

“The Secretary and his friends left the room, Lomas and I went back to the tables, and I told him to clean the scales as I wanted to test them. While he was doing so he slipped the diamond behind the box, and there it lay between the box and the corner of the wall until it was wanted.

“We all left the room as usual, and, as you know, we were searched. When Lomas went on night-duty there was the diamond ready for its balloon voyage. He filled the balloon just so that it lifted the diamond and no more. The lead pipe he just put where the diamond had been—the only place you never looked in. When the row was over on the Monday I locked it up in the safe. We were all searched that day; the next I brought it away and now you may have it.

“Two of the windows were open on account of the heat. He watched his opportunity, and committed it to the air about two hours before dawn. You know what a sudden fall there is in the temperature here just before daybreak. I calculated upon that to contract the volume of the gas sufficiently to destroy the balance and bring the balloon to the ground, and I knew that, if Lomas had obeyed my instructions, it would fall either on the veld or on this side of the hills.

“The balloon was a bright red, and, to make a long story short, I started out before daybreak that morning, as you know, to look for buck. When I got outside the camp I took compass bearings and rode straight down the wind towards the hills. By good luck or good calculation, or both, I must

have followed the course of the balloon almost exactly, for in three hours after I left the camp I saw the little red speck ahead of me up among the stones on the hillside.

“I dodged about for a bit as though I were really after buck, in case anybody was watching me. I worked round to the red spot, put my foot on the balloon, and burst it. I folded the india-rubber up, as I didn’t like to leave it there, and put it in my pocket-book. You remember that when you searched me you didn’t open my pocket-book, as, of course, it was perfectly flat, and the diamond couldn’t possibly have been in it. That’s how you missed your clue, though I don’t suppose it would have been much use to you as you’d already guessed it. However, there it is at your service now.’

“And the diamond?”

‘As I said these three words his whole manner suddenly changed. So far he had spoken quietly and deliberately, and without even a trace of anger in his voice, but now his white, sunken cheeks suddenly flushed a bright fever red and his eyes literally blazed at me. His voice sank to a low, hissing tone that was really horrible to hear.

“The diamond!” he said. “Yes, curse it, and curse you, Mr Inspector Lipinzki—for it and you have been a curse to me! Day and night I have seen the spot where I buried it, and day and night you have kept your nets spread about my feet so that I could not move a step to go and take it. I can bear the suspense no longer. Between you—you and that infernal stone—you have wrecked my health and driven me mad. If I had all the wealth of De Beers’ now it wouldn’t be any use to me, and to-night a new fear came to me—that if this goes on much longer I shall go mad, really mad, and in my delirium rob myself of my revenge on you by letting out where I hid it.

“Now listen. Lomas has gone. He is beyond your reach. He has changed his name—his very identity. I have sent

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him by different posts, and to different names and addresses, two letters. One is a plan and the other is a key to it. With those two pieces of paper he can find the diamond. Without them you can hunt for a century and never go near it.

“And now that you know that—that your incomparable stone, which should have been mine, is out yonder somewhere where you can never find it, you and the De Beers’ people will be able to guess at the tortures of Tantalus that you have made me endure. That is all you have got by your smartness. That is my legacy to you—curse you! If I had my way I would send you all out there to hunt for it without food or drink till you died of hunger and thirst of body, as you have made me die a living death of hunger and thirst of mind.”

‘As he said this, he covered me with one revolver, and put the muzzle of the other into his mouth. With an ungovernable impulse, I sprang to my feet. He pulled both triggers at once. One bullet passed between my arm and my body, ripping a piece out of my coat sleeve; the other—well, I can spare you the details. He dropped dead instantly.’

‘And the diamond?’ I said.

‘The reward is £20,000, and it is at your service,’ replied the Inspector, in his suavest manner, ‘provided that you can find the stone—or Mr Lomas and his plans.’

IV

A Bracelet at Bruges

Arnold Bennett

The bracelet had fallen into the canal.

And the fact that the canal was the most picturesque canal in the old Flemish city of Bruges, and that the ripples caused by the splash of the bracelet had disturbed reflections of wondrous belfries, towers, steeples, and other unique examples of Gothic architecture, did nothing whatever to assuage the sudden agony of that disappearance. For the bracelet had been given to Kitty Sartorius by her grateful and lordly manager, Lionel Belmont (U.S A.), upon the completion of the unexampled run of *The Delminico Doll*, at the Regency Theatre, London. And its diamonds were worth five hundred pounds, to say nothing of the gold.

The beautiful Kitty, and her friend Eve Fincastle, the journalist, having exhausted Ostend, had duly arrived at Bruges in the course of their holiday tour. The question of Kitty's jewellery had arisen at the start. Kitty had insisted that she must travel with all her jewels, according to the custom of theatrical stars of great magnitude. Eve had equally insisted that Kitty must travel without jewels, and had exhorted her to remember the days of her simplicity. They compromised. Kitty was allowed to bring the brace-

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let, but nothing else save the usual half-dozen rings. The ravishing creature could not have persuaded herself to leave the bracelet behind, because it was so recent a gift and still new and strange and heavenly to her. But, since prudence forbade even Kitty to let the trifle lie about in hotel bedrooms, she was obliged always to wear it. And she had been wearing it this bright afternoon in early October, when the girls, during a stroll, had met one of their new friends, Madame Lawrence, on the world-famous Quai du Rosaire, just at the back of the Hotel de Ville and the Halles.

Madame Lawrence resided permanently in Bruges. She was between twenty-five and forty-five, dark, with the air of continually subduing a natural instinct to dash, and well dressed in black. Equally interested in the peerage and in the poor, she had made the acquaintance of Eve and Kitty at the Hotel de la Grande Place, where she called from time to time to induce English travellers to buy genuine Bruges lace, wrought under her own supervision by her own paupers. She was Belgian by birth, and when complimented on her fluent and correct English, she gave all the praise to her deceased husband, an English barrister. She had settled in Bruges like many people settle there, because Bruges is inexpensive, picturesque, and inordinately respectable. Besides an English church and chaplain, it has two cathedrals and an episcopal palace, with a real bishop in it.

‘What an exquisite bracelet! May I look at it?’

It was these simple but ecstatic words, spoken with Madame Lawrence’s charming foreign accent, which had begun the tragedy. The three women had stopped to admire the always admirable view from the little quay, and they were leaning over the rails when Kitty unclasped the bracelet for the inspection of the widow. The next instant there was a *plop*, an affrighted exclamation from Madame Lawrence in her native tongue, and the bracelet was engulfed before the very eyes of all three.

The three looked at each other non-plussed. Then they looked around, but not a single person was in sight. Then, for some reason which, doubtless, psychology can explain, they stared hard at the water, though the water there was just as black and foul as it is everywhere else in the canal system of Bruges.

‘Surely you’ve not dropped it!’ Eve Fincastle exclaimed in a voice of horror. Yet she knew positively that Madame Lawrence had.

The delinquent took a handkerchief from her muff and sobbed into it. And between her sobs she murmured ‘We must inform the police.’

‘Yes, of course,’ said Kitty, with the lightness of one to whom a five-hundred-pound bracelet is a bagatelle. ‘They’ll fish it up in no time.’

‘Well,’ Eve decided, ‘you go to the police at once, Kitty; and Madame Lawrence will go with you, because she speaks French, and I’ll stay here to mark the exact spot.’

The other two started, but Madame Lawrence, after a few steps, put her hand to her side. ‘I can’t’ she sighed, pale. ‘I am too upset. I cannot walk. You go with Miss Sartorius,’ she said to Eve, ‘and I will stay,’ and she leaned heavily against the railings.

Eve and Kitty ran off, just as if it was an affair of seconds, and the bracelet had to be saved from drowning. But they had scarcely turned the corner, thirty yards away, when they reappeared in company with a high official of police, whom, by the most lucky chance in the world, they had encountered in the covered passage leading to the Place du Borg. This official, instantly enslaved by Kitty’s beauty, proved to be the very mirror of politeness and optimism. He took their names and addresses, and a full description of the bracelet, and informed them that at that place the canal was nine feet deep. He said that the bracelet should undoubtedly be recovered on the morrow, but that, as dusk

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was imminent, it would be futile to commence angling that night. In the meantime the lady should be kept secret; and to make all sure, a succession of gendarmes should guard the spot during the night.

Kitty grew radiant, and rewarded the gallant officer with smiles. Eve was satisfied, and the face of Madame Lawrence wore a less mournful hue.

'And now,' said Kitty to Madame, when everything had been arranged, and the first of the gendarmes was duly installed at the exact spot against the railings, 'you must come and take tea with us in our winter garden; and be gay! Smile! I insist. And I insist that you don't worry.'

Madame Lawrence tried feebly to smile.

'You are very good-natured,' she stammered.

Which was decidedly true.

II

The winter-garden of the Hotel de la Grande Place, referred to in all the hotel's advertisements, was merely the inner court of the hotel, roofed in by glass at the height of the first storey. Cane flourished there, in the shape of lounge-chairs, but no other plant. One of the lounge-chairs was occupied when, just as the carillon in the belfry at the other end of the Place began to play Gounod's 'Nazareth', indicating the hour of five o'clock, the three ladies entered the winter-garden. Apparently the toilettes of two of them had been adjusted and embellished as for a somewhat ceremonious occasion.

'Lo!' cried Kitty Sartorius, when she perceived the occupant of the chair, 'the millionaire! Mr Thorold, how charming of you to reappear like this! I invite you to tea.'

Cecil Thorold rose with appropriate eagerness.

'Delighted!' he said, smiling, and then explained that he

had arrived from Ostend about two hours before and had taken rooms in the hotel.

'You knew we were staying here?' Eve asked as he shook hands with her.

'No,' he replied; 'but I am glad to find you again.'

'Are you?' She spoke languidly, but her colour heightened and those eyes of hers sparkled.

'Madame Lawrence,' Kitty chirruped, 'let me present Mr Cecil Thorold. He is appallingly rich, but we mustn't let that frighten us.'

From a mouth less adorable than the mouth of Miss Sartorius such an introduction might have been judged lacking in the elements of good form, but for more than two years now Kitty had known that whatever she did or said was perfectly correct because she did or said it. The new acquaintances laughed amiably and a certain intimacy was at once established.

'Shall I order tea, dear?' Eve suggested.

'No, dear,' said Kitty quietly. 'We will wait for the Count.'

'The Count?' demanded Cecil Thorold.

'The Comte d'Avrec,' Kitty explained. 'He is staying here.'

'A French nobleman, doubtless?'

'Yes,' said Kitty; and she added, 'you will like him. He is an archaeologist, and a musician—oh, and lots of things!'

'If I am one minute late, I entreat pardon,' said a fine tenor voice at the door.

It was the Count. After he had been introduced to Madame Lawrence, and Cecil Thorold had been introduced to him, tea was served.

Now, the Comte d'Avrec was everything that a French count ought to be. As dark as Cecil Thorold, and even handsomer, he was a little older and a little taller than the millionaire, and a short, pointed, black beard, exquisitely

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trimmed, gave him an appearance of staid reliability which Cecil lacked. His bow was a vertebrate poem, his smile a consolation for all misfortunes, and he managed his hat, stick, gloves, and cup with the dazzling assurance of a conjurer. To observe him at afternoon tea was to be convinced that he had been specially created to shine gloriously in drawing-rooms, winter-gardens, and *tables d'hôte*. He was one of those men who always do the right thing at the right moment, who are capable of speaking an indefinite number of languages with absolute purity of accent (he spoke English much better than Madame Lawrence), and who can and do discourse with *verve* and accuracy on all sciences, arts, sports, and religions. In short, he was a phoenix of a count; and this was certainly the opinion of Miss Kitty Sartorius and of Miss Eve Fincastle, both of whom reckoned that what they did not know about men might be ignored. Kitty and the Count, it soon became evident, were mutually attracted; their souls were approaching each other with a velocity which increased inversely as the square of the lessening distance between them. And Eve was watching this approximation with undisguised interest and relish.

Nothing of the least importance occurred, save the Count's marvellous exhibition of how to behave at afternoon tea, until the refecton was nearly over; and then, during a brief pause in the talk, Cecil, who was sitting to the left of Madame Lawrence, looked sharply round at the right shoulder of his tweed coat; he repeated the gesture a second and yet a third time.

'What is the matter with the man?' asked Eve Fincastle. Both she and Kitty were extremely bright, animated, and even excited.

'Nothing. I thought I saw something on my shoulder, that's all,' said Cecil. 'Ah! It's only a bit of thread.' And he picked off the thread with his left hand and held it before Madame Lawrence. 'See! It's a piece of thin black silk,

knotted. At first I took it for an insect—you know how queer things look out of the corner of your eye. Pardon!’ He had dropped the fragment on to Madame Lawrence’s black silk dress. ‘Now it’s lost.’

‘If you will excuse me, kind friends,’ said Madame Lawrence, ‘I will go.’ She spoke hurriedly, and as though in mental distress.

‘Poor thing!’ Kitty Sartorius exclaimed when the widow had gone. ‘She’s still dreadfully upset’; and Kitty and Eve proceeded jointly to relate the story of the diamond bracelet, upon which hitherto they had kept silence (though with difficulty), out of regard for Madame Lawrence’s feelings.

Cecil made almost no comment.

The Count, with the sympathetic excitability of his race, walked up and down the winter-garden, asseverating earnestly that such clumsiness amounted to a crime; then he grew calm and confessed that he shared the optimism of the police as to the recovery of the bracelet; lastly he complimented Kitty on her equable demeanour under this affliction.

‘Do you know, Count,’ said Cecil Thorold, later, after they had all four ascended to the drawing-room overlooking the Grande Place, ‘I was quite surprised when I saw at tea that you had to be introduced to Madame Lawrence.’

‘Why so, my dear Mr Thorold?’ the Count inquired suavely.

‘I thought I had seen you together in Ostend a few days ago.’

The Count shook his wonderful head.

‘Perhaps you have a brother—?’ Cecil paused.

‘No,’ said the Count. ‘But it is a favourite theory of mine that everyone has his double somewhere in the world.’ Previously the Count had been discussing Planchette—he was a great authority on the supernatural, the

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sub-conscious, and the subliminal. He now deviated gracefully to the discussion of the theory of doubles.

‘I suppose you aren’t going out for a walk, dear, before dinner?’ said Eve to Kitty.

‘No, dear,’ said Kitty, positively.

‘I think I shall,’ said Eve.

And her glance at Cecil Thorold intimated in the plainest possible manner that she wished not only to have a companion for a stroll, but to leave Kitty and the Count in dual solitude.

‘I shouldn’t, if I were you, Miss Fincastle,’ Cecil remarked, with calm and studied blindness. ‘It’s risky here in the evenings—with these canals exhaling miasma and mosquitoes and bracelets and all sorts of things.’

‘I will take the risk, thank you,’ said Eve, in an icy tone, and she haughtily departed; she would not cower before Cecil’s millions. As for Cecil, he joined in the discussion of the theory of doubles.

III

On the next afternoon but one, policemen were still fishing, without success, for the bracelet, and raising from the ancient duct long-buried odours which threatened to destroy the inhabitants of the quay. (When Kitty Sartorius had hinted that perhaps the authorities might see their way to drawing off the water from the canal, the authorities had intimated that the death-rate of Bruges was already as high as convenient.) Nevertheless, though nothing had happened, the situation had somehow developed, and in such a manner that the bracelet itself was in danger of being partially forgotten; and of all places in Bruges, the situation had developed on the top of the renowned Belfry which

dominates the Grande Place in particular and the city in general.

The summit of the Belfry is three hundred and fifty feet high, and it is reached by four hundred and two winding stone steps, each a separate menace to life and limb. Eve Fincastle had climbed those steps alone, perhaps in quest of the view at the top, perhaps in quest of spiritual calm. She had not been leaning over the parapet more than a minute before Cecil Thorold had appeared, his field-glasses slung over his shoulder. They had begun to talk a little, but nervously and only in snatches. The wind blew free up there among the forty-eight bells, but the social atmosphere was oppressive.

'The Count is a most charming man,' Eve was saying, as if in defence of the Count.

'He is,' said Cecil; 'I agree with you.'

'Oh, no, you don't, Mr Thorold! Oh, no, you don't!'

Then there was a pause, and the twain looked down upon Bruges, with its venerable streets, its grass-grown squares, its waterways, and its innumerable monuments, spread out maplike beneath them in the mellow October sunshine. Citizens passed along the thoroughfare in the semblance of tiny dwarfs.

'If you didn't hate him,' said Eve, 'you wouldn't behave as you do.'

'How do I behave, then?'

Eve schooled her voice to an imitation of jocularly—

'All Tuesday evening, and all day yesterday, you couldn't leave them alone. You know you couldn't.'

Five minutes later the conversation had shifted.

'You actually saw the bracelet fall into the canal?' said Cecil.

'I actually saw the bracelet fall into the canal. And no one could have got it out while Kitty and I were away, because we weren't away half a minute.'

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But they could not dismiss the subject of the Count, and presently he was again the topic.

‘Naturally it would be a good match for the Count—for *any* man,’ said Eve; ‘but then it would also be a good match for Kitty. Of course, he is not so rich as some people, but he is rich.’

Cecil examined the horizon with his glasses, and then the streets near the Grande Place.

‘Rich, is he? I’m glad of it. By the by, he’s gone to Ghent for the day, hasn’t he?’

‘Yes, he went by the 9.27, and returns by the 4.38.’

Another pause.

‘Well,’ said Cecil at length, handing the glasses to Eve Fincastle, ‘kindly glance down there. Follow the line of the Rue St Nicholas. You see the cream-coloured house with the enclosed courtyard? Now, do you see two figures standing together near a door—a man and a woman, the woman on the steps? Who are they?’

‘I can’t see very well,’ said Eve.

‘Oh, yes, my dear lady, you can,’ said Cecil. ‘These glasses are the very best. Try again.’

‘They look like the Comte d’Avrec and Madame Lawrence,’ Eve murmured.

‘But the Count is on his way from Ghent! I see the steam of the 4.38 over there. The curious thing is that the Count entered the house of Madame Lawrence, to whom he was introduced for the first time the day before yesterday, at ten o’clock this morning. Yes, it would be a very good match for the Count. When one comes to think of it, it usually is that sort of man that contrives to marry a brilliant and successful actress. There! He’s just leaving, isn’t he? Now let us descend and listen to the recital of his day’s doings in Ghent—shall we?’

‘You mean to insinuate,’ Eve burst out in sudden wrath, ‘that the Count is an—an *adventurer*, and that Madame

Lawrence. . . . Oh! Mr Thorold!' She laughed condescendingly. 'This jealousy is too absurd. Do you suppose I haven't noticed how impressed you were with Kitty at the Devonshire Mansion that night, and again at Ostend, and again here? You're simply carried away by jealousy; and you think because you are a millionaire you must have all you want. I haven't the slightest doubt that the Count. . . .'

'Anyhow,' said Cecil, 'let us go down and hear about Ghent.'

His eyes made a number of remarks (indulgent, angry, amused, protective, admiring, perspicacious, puzzled), too subtle for the medium of words.

They groped their way down to earth in silence, and it was in silence that they crossed the Grande Place. The Count was seated on the *terrasse* in front of the hotel, with a liqueur glass before him, and he was making graceful and expressive signs to Kitty Sartorius, who leaned her marvelous beauty out of a first-storey window. He greeted Cecil Thorold and Eve with an equal grace.

'And how is Ghent?' Cecil inquired.

'Did you go to Ghent, after all, Count?' Eve put in. The Comte d'Avrec looked from one to another, and then, instead of replying, he sipped at his glass. 'No,' he said, 'I didn't go. The rather curious fact is that I happened to meet Madame Lawrence, who offered to show me her collection of lace. I have been an amateur of lace for some years, and really Madame Lawrence's collection is amazing. You have seen it? No? You should do so. I'm afraid I have spent most of the day there.'

When the Count had gone to join Kitty in the drawing-room, Eve Fincastle looked victoriously at Cecil, as if to demand of him 'Will you apologise?'

'My dear journalist,' Cecil remarked simply, 'you gave the show away.'

That evening the continued obstinacy of the bracelet,

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‘I may ask you the same question,’ Eve replied, with cold bitterness.

‘Excuse me. You may not. You are a woman. This is the Count’s room——’

‘You are in error,’ she interrupted him. ‘It is not the Count’s room. It is mine. Last night I told the Count I had some important writing to do, and I asked him as a favour to relinquish this room to me for twenty-four hours. He very kindly consented. He removed his belongings, handed me the key of that door, and the transfer was made in the hotel books. And now,’ she added, ‘may I inquire, Mr Thorold, what you are doing in my room?’

‘I—I thought it was the Count’s,’ Cecil faltered, decidedly at a loss for a moment. ‘In offering my humblest apologies, permit me to say that I admire you, Miss Fincastle.’

‘I wish I could return the compliment,’ Eve exclaimed, and she repeated with almost plaintive sincerity: ‘I do wish I could.’

Cecil raised his arms and let them fall to his side.

‘You meant to catch me,’ he said. ‘You suspected something, then? The “important writing” was an invention.’ And he added, with a faint smile: ‘You really ought not to have fallen asleep. Suppose I had not wakened you?’

‘Please don’t laugh, Mr Thorold. Yes, I did suspect. There was something in the demeanour of your servant Lecky that gave me the idea . . . I did mean to catch you. Why you, a millionaire, should be a burglar, I cannot understand. I never understood that incident at the Devonshire Mansion; it was beyond me. I am by no means sure that you didn’t have a great deal to do with the Rainshore affair at Ostend. But that you should have stooped to slander is the worst. I confess you are a mystery. I confess that I can make no guess at the nature of your present scheme. And what I shall do, now that I have caught you, I don’t know. I can’t

decide; I must think. If, however, anything is missing to-morrow morning, I shall be bound in any case to denounce you. You grasp that?’

‘I grasp it perfectly, my dear journalist,’ Cecil replied. ‘And something will not improbably be missing. But take the advice of a burglar and a mystery, and go to bed, it is half past three.’

And Eve went. And Cecil bowed her out and then retired to his own rooms. And the Count’s apartment was left to the moonlight.

V

‘Planchette is a very safe prophet,’ said Cecil to Kitty Sartorius the next morning, ‘provided it has firm guidance.’

They were at breakfast.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that Planchette prophesied last night that I should restore to you your bracelet. I do.’

He took the lovely gewgaw from his pocket and handed it to Kitty.

‘Ho-ow did you find it, you dear thing?’ Kitty stammered, trembling under the shock of joy.

‘I fished it up out—out of the mire by a contrivance of my own.’

‘But when?’

‘Oh! Very early. At three o’clock a.m. You see, I was determined to be first.’

‘In the dark, then?’

‘I had a light. Don’t you think I’m rather clever?’

Kitty’s scene of ecstatic gratitude does not come into the story. Suffice it to say that not until the moment of its restoration did she realise how precious the bracelet was to her.

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which still refused to be caught, began at last to disturb the birdlike mind of Kitty Sartorius. Moreover, the secret was out, and the whole town of Bruges was discussing the episode and the chances of success.

'Let us consult Planchette,' said the Count. The proposal was received with enthusiasm by Kitty. Eve had disappeared.

Planchette was produced; and when asked if the bracelet would be recovered, it wrote, under the hands of Kitty and the Count, a trembling 'Yes'. When asked 'By whom?' it wrote a word that faintly resembled 'Avrec.'

The Count stated that he should personally commence dragging operations at sunrise. 'You will see,' he said, 'I shall succeed.'

'Let me try this toy, may I?' Cecil asked blandly, and, upon Kitty agreeing, he addressed Planchette in a clear voice 'Now, Planchette, who will restore the bracelet to its owner?'

And Planchette wrote 'Thorold,' but in characters as firm and regular as those of a copy-book.

'Mr Thorold is laughing at us,' observed the Count, imperturbably bland.

'How horrid you are, Mr Thorold!' Kitty exclaimed.

IV

Of the four persons more or less interested in the affair, three were secretly active that night, in and out of the hotel. Only Kitty Sartorius, chief mourner for the bracelet, slept placidly in her bed. It was towards three o'clock in the morning that a sort of preliminary crisis was reached.

From the multiplicity of doors which ventilate its rooms, one would imagine that the average foreign hotel must have been designed immediately after its architect had been to

see a Palais Royal farce, in which every room opens into every other room in every act. The Hotel de la Grande Place was not peculiar in this respect; it abounded in doors. All the chambers on the second storey, over the public rooms, fronting the Place, communicated one with the next, but naturally most of the communicating doors were locked. Cecil Thorold and the Comte d'Avrec had each a bedroom and a sitting-room on that floor. The Count's sitting-room adjoined Cecil's, and the door between was locked, and the key in the possession of the landlord.

Nevertheless, at three a.m. this particular door opened noiselessly from Cecil's side, and Cecil entered the domain of the Count. The moon shone, and Cecil could plainly see not only the silhouette of the Belfry across the Place, but also the principal objects within the room. He noticed the table in the middle, the large easy-chair turned towards the hearth, the old-fashioned sofa; but not a single article did he perceive which might have been the personal property of the Count. He cautiously passed across the room through the moonlight to the door of the Count's bedroom, which apparently, to his immense surprise, was not only shut, but locked, and the key in the lock on the sitting-room side. Silently unlocking it, he entered the bedroom and disappeared. . . .

In less than five minutes he crept back into the Count's sitting-room, closed the door and locked it.

'Odd!' he murmured reflectively; but he seemed quite happy.

There was a sudden movement in the region of the hearth, and a form rose from the armchair. Cecil rushed to the switch and turned on the electric light. Eve Fincastle stood before him. They faced each other.

'What are you doing here at this time, Miss Fincastle?' he asked, sternly. 'You can talk freely; the Count will not waken.'

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It was ten o'clock before Eve descended. She had breakfasted in her room, and Kitty had already exhibited to her the prodigal bracelet.

'I particularly want you to go up the Belfry with me, Miss Fincastle,' Cecil greeted her; and his tone was so serious and so urgent that she consented. They left Kitty playing waltzes on the piano in the drawing-room.

'And now, O man of mystery?' Eve questioned, when they had toiled to the summit, and saw the city and its dwarfs beneath them.

'We are in no danger of being disturbed here,' Cecil began; 'but I will make my explanation—the explanation which I certainly owe you—as brief as possible. Your Comte d'Avrec is an adventurer (please don't be angry), and your Madame Lawrence is an adventuress. I knew that I had seen them together. They work in concert, and for the most part make a living on the gaming-tables of Europe. Madame Lawrence was expelled from Monte Carlo last year for being too intimate with a croupier. You may be aware that at a roulette-table one can do a great deal with the aid of the croupier. Madame Lawrence appropriated the bracelet 'on her own', as it were. The Count (he may be a real Count, for anything I know) heard first of that enterprise from the lips of Miss Sartorius. He was annoyed, angry—because he was really a little in love with your friend, and he saw golden prospects. It is just this fact—the Count's genuine passion for Miss Sartorius—that renders the case psychologically interesting. To proceed, Madame Lawrence became jealous. The Count spent six hours yesterday in trying to get the bracelet from her, and failed. He tried again last night, and succeeded, but not too easily, for he did not re-enter the hotel till after one o'clock. At first I thought he had succeeded in the daytime,—and I had arranged accordingly, for I did not see why he should have the honour and glory of restoring the bracelet to its owner.

Lecky and I fixed up a sleeping-draught for him. The minor details were simple. When you caught me this morning, the bracelet was in my pocket, and in its stead I had left a brief note for the perusal of the Count, which has had the singular effect of inducing him to decamp; probably he has not gone alone. But isn't it amusing that, since you so elaborately took his sitting-room, he will be convinced that you are a party to his undoing—you, his staunchest defender?'

Eve's face gradually broke into an embarrassed smile.

'You haven't explained,' she said, 'how Madame Lawrence got the bracelet.'

'Come over here,' Cecil answered. 'Take these glasses and look down at the Quai du Rosaire. You see everything plainly?' Eve could, in fact, see on the quay the little mounds of mud which had been extracted from the canal in the quest of the bracelet. Cecil continued: 'On my arrival in Bruges on Monday, I had a fancy to climb the Belfry at once. I witnessed the whole scene between you and Miss Sartorius and Madame Lawrence, through my glasses. Immediately your backs were turned, Madame Lawrence, her hands behind her, and her back against the railing, began to make a sort of rapid, drawing up motion with her forearms. Then I saw a momentary glitter. . . . Considerably mystified, I visited the spot after you had left it, chatted with the gendarme on duty and got round him, and then it dawned on me that a robbery had been planned, prepared, and executed with extraordinary originality and ingenuity. A long, thin thread of black silk must have been ready tied to the railing, with perhaps a hook at the other end. As soon as Madame Lawrence held the bracelet, she attached the hook to it and dropped it. The silk, especially as it was the last thing in the world you would look for, would be as good as invisible. When you went for the police, Madame retrieved the bracelet, hid it in her muff, and broke off the silk. Only, in her haste, she left a bit of silk tied to the

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railing. That fragment I carried to the hotel. All along she must have been a little uneasy about me. . . . And that's all. Except that I wonder you thought I was jealous of the Count's attentions to your friend.' He gazed at her admiringly.

'I'm glad you are not a thief, Mr Thorold,' said Eve.

'Well,' Cecil smiled, 'as for that, I left him a couple of louis for fares, and I shall pay his hotel bill.'

'Why?'

'There were notes for nearly ten thousand francs with the bracelet. Ill-gotten gains, I am sure. A trifle, but the only reward I shall have for my trouble. I shall put them to good use.' He laughed, serenely gay.

*The Absent-Minded
Coterie*

Robert Barr

I well remember the November day when I first heard of the Summertrees case, because there hung over London a fog so thick that two or three times I lost my way, and no cab was to be had at any price. The few cabmen then in the streets were leading their animals slowly along, making for their stables. It was one of those depressing London days which filled me with ennui and a yearning for my own clear city of Paris, where, if we are ever visited by a slight mist, it is at least clean, white vapour, and not this horrible London mixture saturated with suffocating carbon. The fog was too thick for any passer to read the contents bills of the newspapers plastered on the pavement, and as there were probably no races that day the newsboys were shouting what they considered the next most important event—the election of an American President. I bought a paper and thrust it into my pocket. It was late when I reached my flat, and, after dining there, which was an unusual thing for me to do, I put on my slippers, took an easy-chair before the fire, and began to read my evening journal. I was distressed to learn

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that the eloquent Mr Bryan had been defeated. I knew little about the silver question, but the man's oratorical power had appealed to me, and my sympathy was aroused because he owned many silver mines, and yet the price of the metal was so low that apparently he could not make a living through the operation of them. But, of course, the cry that he was a plutocrat, and a reputed millionaire over and over again, was bound to defeat him in a democracy where the average voter is exceedingly poor and not comfortably well-to-do as is the case with our peasants in France. I always took great interest in the affairs of the huge republic to the west, having been at some pains to inform myself accurately regarding its politics, and although, as my readers know, I seldom quote anything complimentary that is said of me, nevertheless, an American client of mine once admitted that he never knew the true inwardness—I think that was the phrase he used—of American politics until he heard me discourse upon them. But then, he added, he had been a very busy man all his life.

I had allowed my paper to slip to the floor, for in very truth the fog was penetrating even into my flat, and it was becoming difficult to read, notwithstanding the electric light. My man came in, and announced that Mr Spenser Hale wished to see me, and, indeed, any night, but especially when there is rain or fog outside, I am more pleased to talk with a friend than to read a newspaper.

‘*Mon Dieu*, my dear Monsieur Hale, it is a brave man you are to venture out in such a fog as is abroad to-night.’

‘Ah, Monsieur Valmont,’ said Hale with pride, ‘you cannot raise a fog like this in Paris!’

‘No. There you are supreme,’ I admitted, rising and saluting my visitor, then offering him a chair.

‘I see you are reading the latest news,’ he said, indicating my newspaper. ‘I am very glad that man Bryan is defeated. Now we shall have better times.’

I waved my hand as I took my chair again. I will discuss many things with Spenser Hale, but not American politics; he does not understand them. It is a common defect of the English to suffer complete ignorance regarding the internal affairs of other countries.

‘It is surely an important thing that brought you out on such a night as this. The fog must be very thick in Scotland Yard.’

This delicate shaft of fancy completely missed him, and he answered stolidly,

‘It’s thick all over London, and, indeed, throughout most of England.’

‘Yes, it is,’ I agreed, but he did not see that either.

Still a moment later he made a remark which, if it had come from some people I know, might have indicated a glimmer of comprehension.

‘You are a very, very clever man, Monsieur Valmont, so all I need say is that the question which brought me here is the same as that on which the American election was fought. Now, to a countryman, I should be compelled to give further explanation, but to you, monsieur, that will not be necessary.’

There are times when I dislike the crafty smile and partial closing of the eyes which always distinguishes Spenser Hale when he places on the table a problem which he expects will baffle me. If I said he never did baffle me, I would be wrong, of course, for sometimes the utter simplicity of the puzzles which trouble him leads me into an intricate involution entirely unnecessary in the circumstances.

I pressed my finger tips together, and gazed for a few moments at the ceiling. Hale had lit his black pipe, and my silent servant placed at his elbow the whisky and soda, then tip-toed out of the room. As the door closed my eyes came from the ceiling to the level of Hale’s expansive countenance.

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‘Have they eluded you?’ I asked quietly.

‘Who?’

‘The coiners.’

Hale’s pipe dropped from his jaw, but he managed to catch it before it reached the floor. Then he took a gulp from the tumbler.

‘That was just a lucky shot,’ he said.

‘*Parfaitement*,’ I replied carelessly.

‘Now, own up, Valmont, wasn’t it?’

I shrugged my shoulders. A man cannot contradict a guest in his own house.

‘Oh, stow that!’ cried Hale impolitely. He is a trifle prone to strong and even slangy expressions when puzzled. ‘Tell me how you guessed it.’

‘It is very simple, *mon ami*. The question on which the American election was fought is the price of silver, which is so low that it has ruined Mr Bryan, and threatens to ruin all the farmers of the west who possess silver mines on their farms. Silver troubled America, ergo silver troubles Scotland Yard.

‘Very well, the natural inference is that some one has stolen bars of silver. But such a theft happened three months ago, when the metal was being unloaded from a German steamer at Southampton, and my dear friend Spenser Hale ran down the thieves very cleverly as they were trying to dissolve the marks off the bars with acid. Now crimes do not run in series, like the numbers in roulette at Monte Carlo. The thieves are men of brains. They say to themselves, ‘What chance is there successfully to steal bars of silver while Mr Hale is at Scotland Yard?’ Eh, my good friend?’

‘Really, Valmont,’ said Hale taking another sip, ‘sometimes you almost persuade me that you have reasoning powers.’

‘Thanks, comrade. Then it is not a *theft* of silver we have

now to deal with. But the American election was fought on the *price* of silver. If silver had been high in cost, there would have been no silver question. So the crime that is bothering you arises through the low price of silver, and this suggests that it must be a case of illicit coinage, for there the low price of the metal comes in. You have, perhaps, found a more subtle illegitimate act going forward than heretofore. Some one is making your shillings and your half-crowns from real silver, instead of from baser metal, and yet there is a large profit which has not hitherto been possible through the high price of silver. With the old conditions you were familiar, but this new element sets at nought all your previous formulae. That is how I reasoned the matter out.'

'Well, Valmont, you have hit it. I'll say that for you; you have hit it. There is a gang of expert coiners who are putting out real silver money, and making a clear shilling on the half-crown. We can find no trace of the coiners, but we know the man who is shoving the stuff.'

'That ought to be sufficient,' I suggested.

'Yes, it should, but it hasn't proved so up to date. Now I came to-night to see if you would do one of your French tricks for us, right on the quiet.'

'What French trick, Monsieur Spenser Hale?' I inquired with some asperity, forgetting for the moment that the man invariably became impolite when he grew excited.

'No offence intended,' said this blundering officer, who really is a good-natured fellow, but always puts his foot in it, and then apologises. 'I want some one to go through a man's house without a search warrant, spot the evidence, let me know, and then we'll rush the place before he has time to hide his tracks.'

'Who is this man and where does he live?'

'His name is Ralph Summertrees, and he lives in a very natty little bijou residence, as the advertisements call it, situated in no less a fashionable street than Park Lane.'

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'I see. What has aroused your suspicions against him?'

'Well, you know, that's an expensive district to live in; it takes a bit of money to do the trick. This Summertrees has no ostensible business, yet every Friday he goes to the United Capital Bank in Piccadilly, and deposits a bag of swag, usually all silver coins.'

'Yes, and this money?'

'This money, so far as we can learn, contains a good many of these new pieces which never saw the British Mint.'

'It's not all the new coinage, then?'

'Oh, no, he's a bit too artful for that. You see, a man can go round London, his pockets filled with new coinage five-shilling pieces, buy this, that, and the other, and come home with his change in legitimate coins of the realm—half-crowns, florins, shillings, sixpences and all that.'

'I see. Then why don't you nab him one day when his pockets are stuffed with illegitimate five-shilling pieces?'

'That could be done, of course, and I've thought of it, but, you see, we want to land the whole gang. Once we arrest him, without knowing where the money came from, the real comers would take flight.'

'How do you know he is not the real coiner himself?'

Now poor Hale is as easy to read as a book. He hesitated before answering this question, and looked confused as a culprit caught in some dishonest act.

'You need not be afraid to tell me,' I said soothingly after a pause. 'You have had one of your men in Mr Summertrees's house, and so learned that he is not the coiner. But your man has not succeeded in getting you evidence to incriminate other people.'

'You've about hit it again, Monsieur Valmont. One of my men has been Summertrees's butler for two weeks, but, as you say, he has found no evidence.'

'Is he still butler?'

'Yes.'

‘Now tell me how far you have got. You know that Summertrees deposits a bag of coin every Friday in the Piccadilly bank, and I suppose the bank has allowed you to examine one or two of the bags.’

‘Yes, sir, they have, but, you see, banks are very difficult to treat with. They don’t like detectives bothering round, and whilst they do not stand out against the law, still they never answer any more questions than they’re asked, and Mr Summertrees has been a good customer at the United Capital for many years.’

‘Haven’t you found out where the money comes from?’

‘Yes, we have; it is brought there night after night by a man who looks like a respectable city clerk and he puts it into a large safe, of which he holds the key, this safe being on the ground floor, in the dining-room.’

‘Haven’t you followed the clerk?’

‘Yes. He sleeps in the Park Lane house every night, and goes up in the morning to an old curiosity shop in Tottenham Court Road, where he stays all day, returning with his bag of money in the evening.’

‘Why don’t you arrest and question him?’

‘Well, Monsieur Valmont, there is just the same objection to his arrest as to that of Summertrees himself. We could easily arrest both, but we have not the slightest evidence against either of them, and then, although we put the go-betweens in clink, the worst criminals of the lot would escape.’

‘Nothing suspicious about the old curiosity shop?’

‘No. It appears to be perfectly regular.’

‘This game has been going on under your noses for how long?’

‘For about six weeks.’

‘Is Summertrees a married man?’

‘No.’

‘Are there any women servants in the house?’

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‘No, except that three charwomen come in every morning to do up the rooms.’

‘Of what is his household comprised?’

‘There is the butler, then the valet, and last, the French cook.’

‘Ah,’ cried I, ‘the French cook! This case interests me. So Summertrees has succeeded in completely disconcerting your man? Has he prevented him going from top to bottom of the house?’

‘Oh no, he has rather assisted him than otherwise. On one occasion he went to the safe, took out the money, had Podgers—that’s my chap’s name—help him to count it, and then actually sent Podgers to the bank with the bag of coin.’

‘And Podgers has been all over the place?’

‘Yes.’

‘Saw no signs of a coining establishment?’

‘No. It is absolutely impossible that any coining can be done there. Besides, as I tell you, that respectable clerk brings him the money.’

‘I suppose you want me to take Podgers’ position?’

‘Well, Monsieur Valmont, to tell you the truth, I would rather you didn’t. Podgers has done everything a man can do, but I thought if you got into the house, Podgers assisting, you might go through it night after night at your leisure.’

‘I see. That’s just a little dangerous in England. I think I should prefer to assure myself the legitimate standing of being the amiable Podgers’ successor. You say that Summertrees has no business?’

‘Well, sir, not what you might call a business. He is by way of being an author, but I don’t count that any business.’

‘Oh, an author, is he? When does he do his writing?’

‘He locks himself up most of the day in his study.’

‘Does he come out for lunch?’

‘No; he lights a little spirit lamp inside, Podgers tells me,

and makes himself a cup of coffee, which he takes with a sandwich or two.'

'That's rather frugal fare for Park Lane.'

'Yes, Monsieur Valmont, it is, but he makes it up in the evening, when he has a long dinner with all them foreign kickshaws you people like, done by his French cook.'

'Sensible man! Well, Hale, I see I shall look forward with pleasure to making the acquaintance of Mr Summertrees. Is there any restriction on the going and coming of your man Podgers?'

'None in the least. He can get away either night or day.'

'Very good, friend Hale, bring him here to-morrow, as soon as our author locks himself up in his study, or rather, I should say, as soon as the respectable clerk leaves for Tottenham Court Road, which I should guess, as you put it, is about half an hour after his master turns the key of the room in which he writes.'

'You are quite right in that guess, Valmont. How did you hit it?'

'Merely a surmise, Hale. There is a good deal of oddity about that Park Lane house, so it doesn't surprise me in the least that the master gets to work earlier in the morning than the man. I have also a suspicion that Ralph Summertrees knows perfectly well what the estimable Podgers is there for.'

'What makes you think that?'

'I can give no reason except that my opinion of the acuteness of Summertrees has been gradually rising all the while you were speaking, and at the same time my estimate of Podgers' craft has been as steadily declining. However, bring the man here to-morrow, that I may ask him a few questions.'

* * *

Next day, about eleven o'clock, the ponderous Podgers, hat

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‘What time does he leave the house?’

‘At ten o’clock, sir.’

‘When is breakfast served?’

‘At nine o’clock, sir.’

‘At what hour does your master retire to his study?’

‘At half-past nine, sir.’

‘Locks the door on the inside?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Never rings for anything during the day?’

‘Not that I know of, sir.’

‘What sort of a man is he?’

Here Podgers was on familiar ground, and he rattled off a description minute in every particular.

‘What I meant was, Podgers, is he silent, or talkative, or does he get angry? Does he seem furtive, suspicious, anxious, terrorised, calm, excitable, or what?’

‘Well, sir, he is by way of being very quiet, never has much to say for himself; never saw him angry, or excited.’

‘Now, Podgers, you’ve been at Park Lane for a fortnight or more. You are a sharp, alert, observant man. What happens there that strikes you as unusual?’

‘Well, I can’t exactly say, sir,’ replied Podgers, looking rather helplessly from his chief to myself, and back again.

‘Your professional duties have often compelled you to enact the part of butler before, otherwise you wouldn’t do it so well. Isn’t that the case?’

Podgers did not reply, but glanced at his chief. This was evidently a question pertaining to the service, which a subordinate was not allowed to answer. However, Hale said at once,

‘Certainly. Podgers has been in dozens of places.’

‘Well, Podgers, just call to mind some of the other households where you have been employed, and tell me any particulars in which Mr Summertrees’ establishment differs from them.’

Podgers pondered a long time.

‘Well, sir, he do stick to writing pretty close.’

‘Ah, that’s his profession, you see, Podgers. Hard at it from half-past nine till towards seven, I imagine?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Anything else, Podgers? No matter how trivial.’

‘Well, sir, he’s fond of reading too; leastways he’s fond of newspapers.’

‘When does he read?’

‘I’ve never seen him read ’em, sir; indeed, so far as I can tell, I never knew the papers to be opened, but he takes them all in, sir.’

‘What, all the morning papers?’

‘Yes, sir, and all the evening papers too.’

‘Where are the morning papers placed?’

‘On the table in his study, sir.’

‘And the evening papers?’

‘Well, sir, when the evening papers come, the study is locked. They are put on a side table in the dining-room, and he takes them upstairs with him to his study.’

‘This has happened every day since you’ve been there?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You reported that very striking fact to your chief, of course?’

‘No, sir, I don’t think I did,’ said Podgers, confused.

‘You should have done so. Mr Hale would have known how to make the most of a point so vital.’

‘Oh, come now, Valmont,’ interrupted Hale, ‘you’re chaffing us. Plenty of people take in all the papers!’

‘I think not. Even clubs and hotels subscribe to the leading journals only. You said *all*, I think, Podgers?’

‘Well, *nearly* all, sir.’

‘But which is it? There’s a vast difference.’

‘He takes a good many, sir.’

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in hand, followed his chief into my room. His broad, impassive, immobile smooth face gave him rather more the air of a genuine butler than I had expected, and this appearance, of course, was enhanced by his livery. His replies to my questions were those of a well-trained servant who will not say too much unless it is made worth his while. All in all, Podgers exceeded my expectations, and really my friend Hale had some justification for regarding him, as he evidently did, as a triumph in his line.

‘Sit down, Mr Hale, and you, Podgers.’

The man disregarded my invitation, standing like a statue until his chief made a motion; then he dropped into a chair. The English are great on discipline.

‘Now, Mr Hale, I must first congratulate you on the make-up of Podgers. It is excellent. You depend less on artificial assistance than we do in France, and in that I think you are right.’

‘Oh, we know a bit over here, Monsieur Valmont,’ said Hale, with pardonable pride.

‘Now then, Podgers, I want to ask you about this clerk. What time does he arrive in the evening?’

‘At prompt six, sir.’

‘Does he ring, or let himself in with a latchkey?’

‘With a latchkey, sir.’

‘How does he carry the money?’

‘In a little locked leather satchel, sir, flung over his shoulder.’

‘Does he go direct to the dining-room?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Have you seen him unlock the safe and put in the money?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Does the safe unlock with a word or a key?’

‘With a key, sir. It’s one of the old-fashioned kind.’

‘Then the clerk unlocks his leather money bag?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘That’s three keys used within as many minutes. Are they separate or in a bunch?’

‘In a bunch, sir.’

‘Did you ever see your master with this bunch of keys?’

‘No, sir.’

‘You saw him open the safe once, I am told?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Did he use a separate key, or one of a bunch?’

Podgers slowly scratched his head, then said,

‘I don’t just remember, sir.’

‘Ah, Podgers, you are neglecting the big things in that house. Sure you can’t remember?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Once the money is in and the safe locked up, what does the clerk do?’

‘Goes to his room, sir.’

‘Where is this room?’

‘On the third floor, sir.’

‘Where do you sleep?’

‘On the fourth floor with the rest of the servants, sir.’

‘Where does the master sleep?’

‘On the second floor, adjoining his study.’

‘The house consists of four stories and a basement, does it?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I have somehow arrived at the suspicion that it is a very narrow house. Is that true?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Does the clerk ever dine with your master?’

‘No, sir. The clerk don’t eat in the house at all, sir.’

‘Does he go away before breakfast?’

‘No, sir.’

‘No one takes breakfast to his room?’

‘No, sir.’

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‘How many?’

‘I don’t just know, sir.’

‘That’s easily found out, Valmont,’ cried Hale, with some impatience, ‘if you think it really important.’

‘I think it so important that I’m going back with Podgers myself. You can take me into the house, I suppose, when you return?’

‘Oh, yes, sir.’

‘Coming back to these newspapers for a moment, Podgers. What is done with them?’

‘They are sold to the ragman, sir, once a week.’

‘Who takes them from the study?’

‘I do, sir.’

‘Do they appear to have been read very carefully?’

‘Well, no, sir; leastways, some of them seem never to have been opened, or else folded up very carefully again.’

‘Did you notice that extracts have been clipped from any of them?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Does Mr Summertrees keep a scrapbook?’

‘Not that I know of, sir.’

‘Oh, the case is perfectly plain,’ said I, leaning back in my chair, and regarding the puzzled Hale with that cherubic expression of self-satisfaction which I know is so annoying to him.

‘*What’s* perfectly plain?’ he demanded, more gruffly perhaps than etiquette would have sanctioned.

‘Summertrees is no coiner, nor is he linked with any band of coiners.’

‘What is he, then?’

‘Ah, that opens another avenue of inquiry. For all I know to the contrary, he may be the most honest of men. On the surface it would appear that he is a reasonably industrious tradesman in Tottenham Court Road, who is

anxious that there should be no visible connection between a plebeian employment and so aristocratic a residence as that in Park Lane.'

At this point Spenser Hale gave expression to one of those rare flashes of reason which are always an astonishment to his friends.

'That is nonsense, Monsieur Valmont,' he said, 'the man who is ashamed of the connection between his business and his house is one who is trying to get into Society, or else the women of his family are trying it, as is usually the case. Now Summertrees has no family. He himself goes nowhere, gives no entertainments, and accepts no invitations. He belongs to no club, therefore to say that he is ashamed of his connection with the Tottenham Court Road shop is absurd. He is concealing the connection for some other reason that will bear looking into.'

'My dear Hale, the goddess of Wisdom herself could not have made a more sensible series of remarks. Now, *mon ami*, do you want my assistance, or have you enough to go on with?'

'Enough to go on with? We have nothing more than we had when I called on you last night.'

'Last night, my dear Hale, you supposed this man was in league with corners. To-day you know he is not.'

'I know you *say* he is not.'

I shrugged my shoulders, and raised my eyebrows, smiling at him.

'It is the same thing, Monsieur Hale.'

'Well, of all the concerted—' and the good Hale could go no further.

'If you wish my assistance, it is yours.'

'Very good. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I do.'

'In that case, my dear Podgers, you will return to the residence of our friend Summertrees, and get together for me in a bundle all of yesterday's morning and evening

papers, that were delivered to the house. Can you do that, or are they mixed up in a heap in the coal cellar?’

‘I can do it, sir. I have instructions to place each day’s papers in a pile by itself in case they should be wanted again. There is always one week’s supply in the cellar and we sell the papers of the week before to the rag man.’

‘Excellent. Well, take the risk of abstracting one day’s journals, and have them ready for me. I will call upon you at half-past three o’clock exactly, and then I want you to take me upstairs to the clerk’s bedroom in the third storey, which I suppose is not locked during the daytime?’

‘No, sir, it is not.’

With this the patient Podgers took his departure. Spenser Hale rose when his assistant left.

‘Anything further I can do?’ he asked.

‘Yes; give me the address of the shop in Tottenham Court Road. Do you happen to have about you one of those new five-shilling pieces which you believe to be illegally coined?’

He opened his pocket-book, took out the bit of white metal, and handed it to me.

‘I’m going to pass this off before evening,’ I said, putting it in my pocket, ‘and I hope none of your men will arrest me.’

‘That’s all right,’ laughed Hale as he took his leave.

At half-past three Podgers was waiting for me, and opened the front door as I came up the steps, thus saving me the necessity of ringing. The house seemed strangely quiet. The French cook was evidently down in the basement, and we had probably all the upper part to ourselves, unless Summertrees was in his study, which I doubted. Podgers led me directly upstairs to the clerk’s room on the third floor, walking on tiptoe, with an elephantine air of silence and secrecy combined, which struck me as unnecessary.

‘I will make an examination of this room,’ I said. ‘Kindly wait for me down by the door of the study.’

The bedroom proved to be of respectable size when one considers the smallness of the house. The bed was all nicely made up, and there were two chairs in the room, but the usual washstand and swing-mirror were not visible. However, seeing a curtain at the farther end of the room, I drew it aside, and found, as I expected a fixed lavatory in an alcove of perhaps four feet deep by five in width. As the room was about fifteen feet wide, this left two-thirds of the space unaccounted for. A moment later, I opened a door which exhibited a closet filled with clothes hanging on hooks. This left a space of five feet between the clothes closet and the lavatory. I thought at first that the entrance to the secret stairway must have issued from the lavatory, but examining the boards closely, although they sounded hollow to the knuckles, they were quite evidently plain matchboarding, and not a concealed door. The entrance to the stairway, therefore, must issue from the clothes closet. The right hand wall proved similar to the matchboarding of the lavatory as far as the casual eye or touch was concerned, but I saw at once it was a door. The latch turned out to be somewhat ingeniously operated by one of the hooks which held a pair of old trousers. I found that the hook, if pressed upward, allowed the door to swing outward, over the stairhead. Descending to the second floor, a similar latch let me in to a similar clothes closet in the room beneath. The two rooms were identical in size, one directly above the other, the only difference being that the lower room door gave into the study, instead of into the hall, as was the case with the upper chamber.

The study was extremely neat, either not much used, or the abode of a very methodical man. There was nothing on the table except a pile of that morning's papers. I walked to the farther end, turned the key in the lock, and came out upon the astonished Podgers.

'Well, I'm blowed!' exclaimed he.

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'Quite so,' I rejoined, 'you've been tiptoeing past an empty room for the last two weeks. Now, if you'll come with me, Podgers, I'll show you how the trick is done.'

When he entered the study, I locked the door once more, and led the assumed butler, still tiptoeing through force of habit, up the stair into the top bedroom, and so out again, leaving everything exactly as we found it. We went down the main stair to the front hall, and there Podgers had my parcel of papers all neatly wrapped up. This bundle I carried to my flat, gave one of my assistants some instructions, and left him at work on the papers.

* * *

I took a cab to the foot of Tottenham Court Road, and walked up that street till I came to J. Simpson's old curiosity shop. After gazing at the well-filled windows for some time, I stepped inside, having selected a little iron crucifix displayed behind the pane; the work of some ancient craftsman.

I knew at once from Podgers' description that I was waited upon by the veritable respectable clerk who brought the bag of money each night to Park Lane, and who I was certain was no other than Ralph Summertrees himself.

There was nothing in his manner differing from that of any other quiet salesman. The price of the crucifix proved to be seven-and-six, and I threw down a sovereign to pay for it.

'Do you mind the change being all in silver, sir?' he asked, and I answered without any eagerness, although the question aroused a suspicion that had begun to be allayed.

'Not in the least.'

He gave me half-a-crown, three two-shilling pieces, and four separate shillings, all the coins being well-worn silver of the realm, the undoubted martistic product of the reputable British Mint. This seemed to dispose of the theory that he was palming off illegitimate money. He asked me if I were

interested in any particular branch of antiquity, and I replied that my curiosity was merely general, and exceedingly amateurish, whereupon he invited me to look around. This I proceeded to do, while he resumed the addressing and stamping of some wrapped-up pamphlets which I surmised to be copies of his catalogue.

He made no attempt either to watch me or to press his wares upon me. I selected at random a little ink-stand, and asked its price. It was two shillings, he said, whereupon I produced my fraudulent five-shilling piece. He took it, gave me the change without comment, and the last doubt about his connection with comers flickered from my mind.

At this moment a young man came in, who, I saw at once, was not a customer. He walked briskly to the farther end of the shop, and disappeared behind a partition which had one pane of glass in it that gave an outlook towards the front door.

‘Excuse me a moment,’ said the shopkeeper, and he followed the young man into the private office.

As I examined the curious heterogeneous collection of things for sale, I heard the clink of coins being poured out on the lid of a desk or an uncovered table, and the murmur of voices floated out to me. I was now near the entrance of the shop, and by a sleight-of-hand trick, keeping the corner of my eye on the glass pane of the private office, I removed the key of the front door without a sound, and took an impression of it in wax, returning the key to its place unobserved. At this moment another young man came in, and walked straight past me into the private office. I heard him say,

‘Oh, I beg pardon, Mr Simpson. How are you, Rogers?’

‘Hallo, Macpherson,’ saluted Rogers, who then came out, bidding good-night to Mr Simpson, and departed whistling down the street, but not before he had repeated his phrase

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to another young man entering, to whom he gave the name of Tyrrel.

I noted these three names in my mind. Two others came in together, but I was compelled to content myself with memorising their features, for I did not learn their names. These men were evidently collectors, for I heard the rattle of money in every case; yet here was a small shop, doing apparently very little business, for I had been within it for more than half an hour, and yet remained the only customer. If credit were given, one collector would certainly have been sufficient, yet five had come in, and had poured their contributions into the pile Summertrees was to take home with him that night.

I determined to secure one of the pamphlets which the man had been addressing. They were piled on a shelf behind the counter, but I had no difficulty in reaching across and taking the top one, which I slipped into my pocket. When the fifth young man went down the street Summertrees himself emerged, and this time he carried in his hand the well-filled locked leather satchel, with the straps dangling. It was now approaching half-past five, and I saw he was eager to close up and get away.

‘Anything else you fancy, sir?’ he asked me.

‘No, or rather yes and no. You have a very interesting collection here, but it’s getting so dark I can hardly see.’

‘I close at half-past five, sir.’

‘Ah, in that case,’ I said, consulting my watch, ‘I shall be pleased to call some other time.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ replied Summertrees quietly, and with that I took my leave.

From the corner of an alley on the other side of the street—I saw him put up the shutters with his own hands, then he emerged with overcoat on, and the money satchel slung across his shoulder. He locked the door, tested it with his knuckles, and walked down the street, carrying under one

from the pamphlets he had been addressing. I followed him some distance, saw him drop the pamphlets into the box at the first post office he passed, and walk rapidly towards his house in Park Lane.

When I returned to my flat and called in my assistant, he said,

‘After putting to one side the regular advertisements of pills, soap, and what not, here is the only one common to all the newspapers, morning and evening alike. The advertisements are not identical, sir, but they have two points of similarity, or perhaps I should say three. They all profess to furnish a cure for absent-mindedness; they all ask that the applicant’s chief hobby will be stated, and they all bear the same address: Dr Willoughby, in Tottenham Court Road.’

‘Thank you,’ said I, as he placed the scissored advertisements before me.

I read several of the announcements. They were all small, and perhaps that is why I had never noticed one of them in the newspapers, for certainly they were odd enough. Some asked for lists of absent-minded men, with the hobbies of each, and for these lists, prices of from one shilling to six were offered. In other clippings Dr Willoughby professed to be able to cure absent-mindedness. There were no fees, and no treatment, but a pamphlet would be sent, which, if it did not benefit the receiver, could do no harm. The doctor was unable to meet patients personally, nor could he enter into correspondence with them. The address was the same as that of the old curiosity shop in Tottenham Court Road. At this juncture I pulled the pamphlet from my pocket, and saw it was entitled *Christian Science and Absent Mindedness*, by Dr Stamford Willoughby, and at the end of the article was the statement contained in the advertisements, that Dr Willoughby would neither see patients nor hold any correspondence with them.

I drew a sheet of paper towards me, wrote to Dr

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Willoughby alleging that I was a very absent-minded man, and would be glad of his pamphlet, adding that my special hobby was the collecting of first editions. I then signed myself, 'Alport Webster, Imperial Flats, London, W.'

I may here explain that it is often necessary for me to see people under some other name than the well-known appellation of Eugène Valmont. There are two doors to my flat, and on one of these is painted, 'Eugène Valmont'; on the other there is a receptacle, into which can be slipped a sliding panel bearing any *nom de guerre* I choose. The same device is arranged on the ground floor, where the names of all the occupants of the building appear on the right-hand wall.

I sealed, addressed, and stamped my letter, then told my man to put out the name of Alport Webster, and if I did not happen to be in when any one called upon that mythical person, he was to make an appointment for me.

It was nearly six o'clock next afternoon when the card of Angus Macpherson was brought in to Mr Alport Webster. I recognized the young man at once as the second who had entered the little shop carrying his tribute to Mr Simpson the day before. He held three volumes under his arm, and spoke in such a pleasant, insinuating sort of way, that I knew at once he was an adept at his profession of canvasser.

'Will you be seated, Mr Macpherson? In what can I serve you?'

He placed the three volumes, backs upward, on my table.

'Are you interested at all in first editions, Mr Webster?'

'It is the one thing I am interested in,' I replied; 'but unfortunately they often run into a lot of money.'

'That is true,' said Macpherson sympathetically, 'and I have here three books, one of which is an exemplification of what you say. This one costs a hundred pounds. The last copy that was sold by auction in London brought a hundred and twenty-three pounds. This next one is forty pounds, and the third ten pounds. At these prices I am certain you

could not duplicate three such treasures in any book shop in Britain.'

I examined them critically, and saw at once that what he said was true. He was still standing on the opposite side of the table.

'Please take a chair, Mr Macpherson. Do you mean to say, you go round London with a hundred and fifty pounds worth of goods under your arm in this careless way?'

The young man laughed.

'I run very little risk, Mr Webster. I don't suppose any one I meet imagines for a moment there is more under my arm than perhaps a trio of volumes I have picked up in the fourpenny box to take home with me.'

I lingered over the volume for which he asked a hundred pounds, then said, looking across at him,

'How came you to be possessed of this book, for instance?'

He turned upon me a fine, open countenance, and answered without hesitation in the frankest possible manner,

'I am not in actual possession of it, Mr Webster. I am by way of being a connoisseur in rare and valuable books myself, although, of course, I have little money with which to indulge in the collection of them. I am acquainted, however, with the lovers of desirable books in different quarters of London. These three volumes, for instance, are from the library of a private gentleman in the West End. I have sold many books to him, and he knows I am trustworthy. He wishes to dispose of them at something under their real value, and has kindly allowed me to conduct the negotiation. I make it my business to find out those who are interested in rare books, and by such trading I add considerably to my income.'

'How, for instance, did you learn that I was a bibliophile?'

Mr Macpherson laughed genially.

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‘Well, Mr Webster, I must confess that I chanced it. I do that very often. I take a flat like this, and send in my card to the name on the door. If I am invited in, I ask the occupant the question I asked you just now: “Are you interested in rare editions?” If he says no, I simply beg pardon and retire. If he says yes, then I show my wares.’

‘I see,’ said I, nodding. What a glib young liar he was with that innocent face of his, and yet my next question brought forth the truth.

‘As this is the first time you have called upon me, Mr Macpherson, you have no objection to my making some further inquiry, I suppose. Would you mind telling me the name of the owner of these books in the West End?’

‘His name is Mr Ralph Summertrees, of Park Lane.’

‘Of Park Lane? Ah, indeed.’

‘I shall be glad to leave the books with you, Mr Webster, and if you care to make an appointment with Mr Summertrees, I am sure he will not object to say a word in my favour.’

‘Oh, I do not in the least doubt it, and should not think of troubling the gentleman.’

‘I was going to tell you,’ went on the young man, ‘that I have a friend, a capitalist, who, in a way, is my supporter; for, as I said, I have little money of my own. I find it is often inconvenient for people to pay down any considerable sum. When, however, I strike a bargain, my capitalist buys the books, and I make an arrangement with my customer to pay a certain amount each week, and so even a large purchase is not felt, as I make the instalments small enough to suit my client.’

‘You are employed during the day, I take it?’

‘Yes, I am a clerk in the City.’

Again we were in the blissful realms of fiction!

‘Suppose I take this book at ten pounds, what instalment should I have to pay each week?’

'Oh, what you like, sir. Would five shillings be too much?'

'I think not.'

'Very well, sir, if you pay me five shillings now, I will leave the book with you, and shall have pleasure in calling this day week for the next instalment.'

I put my hand into my pocket, and drew out two half-crowns, which I passed over to him.

'Do I need to sign any form or undertaking to pay the rest?'

The young man laughed cordially.

'Oh, no, sir, there is no formality necessary. You see, sir, this is largely a labour of love with me, although I don't deny I have my eye on the future. I am getting together what I hope will be a very valuable connection with gentlemen like yourself who are fond of books, and I trust some day that I may be able to resign my place with the insurance company and set up a choice little business of my own, where my knowledge of values in literature will prove useful.'

And then, after making a note in a little book he took from his pocket, he bade me a most graceful good-bye and departed, leaving me cogitating over what it all meant.

Next morning two articles were handed to me. The first came by post and was a pamphlet on *Christian Science and Absent Mindedness*, exactly similar to the one I had taken away from the old curiosity shop; the second was a small key made from my wax impression that would fit the front door of the same shop—a key fashioned by an excellent anarchist friend of mine in an obscure street near Holborn.

That night at ten o'clock I was inside the old curiosity shop, with a small storage battery in my pocket, and a little electric glow lamp at my buttonhole, a most useful instrument for either burglar or detective.

I had expected to find the books of the establishment in a safe, which, if it was similar to the one in Park Lane, I was prepared to open with the false keys in my possession or to

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tobacco. He received me with the curtness I had been taught to expect when I inflicted myself upon him at his office. He greeted me abruptly with,

‘I say, Valmont, how long do you expect to be on this job?’

‘What job?’ I asked mildly.

‘Oh, you know what I mean: the Summertrees affair.’

‘Oh, *that!*’ I exclaimed, with surprise. ‘The Summertrees case is already completed, of course. If I had known you were in a hurry, I should have finished up everything yesterday, but as you and Podgers, and I don’t know how many more, have been at it sixteen or seventeen days, if not longer, I thought I might venture to take as many hours, as I am working entirely alone. You said nothing about haste, you know.’

‘Oh, come now, Valmont, that’s a bit thick. Do you mean to say you have already got evidence against the man?’

‘Evidence absolute and complete.’

‘Then who are the coiners?’

‘My most estimable friend, how often have I told you not to jump at conclusions? I informed you when you first spoke to me about the matter that Summertrees was neither a coiner nor a confederate of coiners. I secured evidence sufficient to convict him of quite another offence, which is probably unique in the annals of crime. I have penetrated the mystery of the shop, and discovered the reason for all those suspicious actions which quite properly set you on his trail. Now I wish you to come to my flat next Wednesday night at a quarter to six, prepared to make an arrest.’

‘I must know who I am to arrest, and on what counts.’

‘Quite so, *mon ami* Hale; I did not say you were to make an arrest, but merely warned you to be prepared. If you have time now to listen to the disclosures, I am quite at your service. I promise you there are some original features in the case. If, however, the present moment is inopportune,

drop in on me at your convenience, previously telephoning so that you may know whether I am there or not, and thus your valuable time will not be expended purposelessly.'

With this I presented to him my most courteous bow, and although his mystified expression hinted a suspicion that he thought I was chaffing him, as he would call it, official dignity dissolved somewhat, and he intimated his desire to hear all about it then and there. I had succeeded in arousing my friend Hale's curiosity. He listened to the evidence with perplexed brow, and at last ejaculated he would be blessed.

'This young man,' I said, in conclusion, 'will call upon me at six on Wednesday afternoon, to receive his second five shillings. I propose that you, in your uniform, shall be seated there with me to receive him, and I am anxious to study Mr Macpherson's countenance when he realizes he has walked in to confront a policeman. If you will then allow me to cross-examine him for a few moments, not after the manner of Scotland Yard, with a warning lest he incriminate himself, but in the free and easy fashion we adopt in Paris, I shall afterwards turn the case over to you to be dealt with at your discretion.'

'You have a wonderful flow of language, Monsieur Valmont,' was the officer's tribute to me. 'I shall be on hand at a quarter to six on Wednesday.'

'Meanwhile,' said I, 'kindly say nothing of this to any one. We must arrange a complete surprise for Macpherson. That is essential. Please make no move in the matter at all until Wednesday night.'

Spenser Hale, much impressed, nodded acquiescence, and I took a polite leave of him.

* * *

The question of lighting is an important one in a room such as mine, and electricity offers a good deal of scope to the

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take an impression of the keyhole and trust to my anarchist friend for the rest. But to my amazement I discovered all the papers pertaining to the concern in a desk which was not even locked. The books, three in number, were the ordinary day book, journal, and ledger referring to the shop; book-keeping of the older fashion; but in a portfolio lay half a dozen foolscap sheets, headed 'Mr Rogers's List', 'Mr Macpherson's', 'Mr Tyrrel's', the names I had already learned, and three others. These lists contained in the first column, names; in the second column, addresses; in the third, sums of money; and then in the small, square places following were amounts ranging from two-and-sixpence to a pound. At the bottom of Mr Macpherson's list was the name Alport Webster, Imperial Flats, £10; then in the small, square place, five shillings. These six sheets, each headed by a canvasser's name, were evidently the record of current collections, and the innocence of the whole thing was so apparent that if it were not for my fixed rule never to believe that I am at the bottom of any case until I have come on something suspicious, I would have gone out empty-handed as I came in.

The six sheets were loose in a thin portfolio, but standing on a shelf above the desk were a number of fat volumes, one of which I took down, and saw that it contained similar lists running back several years. I noticed on Mr Macpherson's current list the name of Lord Semptam, an eccentric old nobleman whom I knew slightly. Then turning to the list immediately before the current one the name was still there; I traced it back through list after list until I found the first entry, which was no less than three years previous, and there Lord Semptam was down for a piece of furniture costing fifty pounds, and on that account he had paid a pound a week for more than three years, totalling a hundred and seventy pounds at the least, and instantly the glorious simplicity of the scheme dawned upon me, and I became so

interested in the swindle that I lit the gas, fearing my little lamp would be exhausted before my investigation ended, for it promised to be a long one.

In several instances the intended victim proved shrewder than old Simpson had counted upon and the word 'Settled' had been written on the line carrying the name when the exact number of instalments was paid. But as these shrewd persons dropped out, others took their places, and Simpson's dependence on their absent-mindedness seemed to be justified in nine cases out of ten. His collectors were collecting long after the debt had been paid. In Lord Semptam's case, the payment had evidently become chronic, and the old man was giving away his pound a week to the suave Macpherson two years after his debt had been liquidated.

From the big volume I detached the loose leaf, dated 1893, which recorded Lord Semptam's purchase of a carved table for fifty pounds, and on which he had been paying a pound a week from that time to the date of which I am writing, which was November, 1896. This single document taken from the file of three years previous, was not likely to be missed, as would have been the case if I had selected a current sheet. I nevertheless made a copy of the names and addresses of Macpherson's present clients; then, carefully placing everything exactly as I had found it, I extinguished the gas, and went out of the shop, locking the door behind me. With the 1893 sheet in my pocket I resolved to prepare a pleasant little surprise for my suave friend Macpherson when he called to get his next instalment of five shillings.

Late as was the hour when I reached Trafalgar Square, I could not deprive myself of the felicity of calling on Mr Spenser Hale, who I knew was then on duty. He never appeared at his best during office hours, because officialism stiffened his stalwart frame. Mentally he was impressed with the importance of his position, and added to this he was not then allowed to smoke his big, black pipe and terrible

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ingenious. Of this fact I have taken full advantage. I can manipulate the lighting of my room so that any particular spot is bathed in brilliancy, while the rest of the space remains in comparative gloom, and I arranged the lamps so that the full force of their rays impinged against the door that Wednesday evening, while I sat on one side of the table in semi-darkness and Hale sat on the other, with a light beating down on him from above which gave him the odd, sculptured look of a living statue of Justice, stern and triumphant. Any one entering the room would first be dazzled by the light, and next would see the gigantic form of Hale in the full uniform of his order.

When Angus Macpherson was shown into this room he was quite visibly taken aback, and paused abruptly on the threshold, his gaze riveted on the huge policeman. I think his first purpose was to turn and run, but the door closed behind him, and he doubtless heard, as we all did, the sound of the bolt being thrust in its place, thus locking him in.

‘I—I beg your pardon,’ he stammered, ‘I expected to meet Mr Webster.’

As he said this, I pressed the button under my table, and was instantly enshrouded with light. A sickly smile overspread the countenance of Macpherson as he caught sight of me, and he made a very creditable attempt to carry off the situation with nonchalance.

‘Oh, there you are, Mr Webster; I did not notice you at first.’

It was a tense moment. I spoke slowly and impressively.

‘Sir, perhaps you are not unacquainted with the name of Eugène Valmont.’

He replied brazenly,

‘I am sorry to say, sir, I never heard of the gentleman before.’

At this came a most inopportune ‘Haw-haw’ from that

blockhead Spenser Hale, completely spoiling the dramatic situation I had elaborated with such thought and care. It is little wonder the English possess no drama, for they show scant appreciation of the sensational moments in life.

‘Haw-haw,’ brayed Spenser Hale, and at once reduced the emotional atmosphere to a fog of commonplace. However, what is a man to do? He must handle the tools with which it pleases Providence to provide him. Ignored Hale’s untimely laughter.

‘Sit down, sir,’ I said to Macpherson, and he obeyed.

‘You have called on Lord Semptam this week,’ I continued sternly.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And collected a pound from him?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘In October, 1893, you sold Lord Semptam a carved antique table for fifty pounds?’

‘Quite right, sir.’

‘When you were here last week you gave me Ralph Summertrees as the name of a gentleman living in Park Lane. You knew at the time that this man was your employer?’

Macpherson was now looking fixedly at me, and on this occasion made no reply. I went on calmly,

‘You also knew that Summertrees, of Park Lane, was identical with Simpson, of Tottenham Court Road?’

‘Well, sir,’ said Macpherson, ‘I don’t exactly see what you’re driving at, but it’s quite usual for a man to carry on a business under an assumed name. There is nothing illegal about that.’

‘We will come to the illegality in a moment, Mr Macpherson. You, and Rogers, and Tyrrel, and three others, are confederates of this man Simpson.’

‘We are in his employ; yes, sir, but no more confederates than clerks usually are.’

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‘I think, Mr Macpherson, I have said enough to show you that the game is, what you call, up. You are now in the presence of Mr Spenser Hale, from Scotland Yard, who is waiting to hear your confession.’

Here the stupid Hale broke in with his—

‘And remember, sir, that anything you say will be——’

‘Excuse me, Mr Hale,’ I interrupted hastily, ‘I shall turn over the case to you in a very few moments, but I ask you to remember our compact, and to leave it for the present entirely in my hands. Now, Mr Macpherson, I want your confession, and I want it at once.’

‘Confession? Confederates?’ protested Macpherson with admirably simulated surprise. ‘I must say you use extraordinary terms, Mr—Mr— What did you say the name was?’

‘Haw-haw,’ roared Hale. ‘His name is Monsieur Valmont’.

‘I implore you, Mr Hale, to leave this man to me for a very few moments. Now, Macpherson, what have you to say in your defence?’

‘Where nothing criminal has been alleged, Monsieur Valmont, I see no necessity for defence. If you wish me to admit that somehow you have acquired a number of details regarding our business, I am perfectly willing to do so, and to subscribe to their accuracy. If you will be good enough to let me know of what you complain, I shall endeavour to make the point clear to you if I can. There has evidently been some misapprehension, but for the life of me, without further explanation, I am as much in a fog as I was on my way coming here, for it is getting a little thick outside.’

Macpherson certainly was conducting himself with great discretion, and presented, quite unconsciously, a much more diplomatic figure than my friend, Spenser Hale, sitting stiffly opposite me. His tone was one of mild expostulation, mitigated by the intimation that all misunderstanding speedily would be cleared away. To outward view he offered

a perfect picture of innocence, neither protesting too much nor too little. I had, however, another surprise in store for him, a trump card, as it were, and I played it down on the table.

‘There!’ I cried with vim, ‘have you ever seen that sheet before!’

He glanced at it without offering to take it in his hand.

‘Oh, yes,’ he said, ‘that has been abstracted from our file. It is what I call my visiting list.’

‘Come, come, sir,’ I cried sternly, ‘you refuse to confess, but I warn you we know all about it. You never heard of Dr Willoughby, I suppose?’

‘Yes, he is the author of the silly pamphlet on Christian Science.’

‘You are in the right, Mr Macpherson; on Christian Science and Absent Mindedness.’

‘Possibly. I haven’t read it for a long while.’

‘Have you ever met this learned doctor, Mr Macpherson?’

‘Oh, yes. Dr Willoughby is the pen-name of Mr Summertrees. He believes in Christian Science and that sort of thing, and writes about it.’

‘Ah, really. We are getting your confession bit by bit, Mr Macpherson. I think it would be better to be quite frank with us.’

‘I was just going to make the same suggestion to you, Monsieur Valmont. If you will tell me in a few words exactly what is your charge against either Mr Summertrees or myself, I will know then what to say.’

‘We charge you, sir, with obtaining money under false pretences, which is a crime that has landed more than one distinguished financier in prison.’

Spenser Hale shook his fat forefinger at me, and said,

‘Tut, tut, Valmont; we mustn’t threaten, we mustn’t threaten, you know;’ but I went on without heeding him.

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‘Take for instance, Lord Semptam. You sold him a table for fifty pounds, on the instalment plan. He was to pay a pound a week, and in less than a year the debt was liquidated. But he is an absent-minded man, as all your clients are. That is why you came to me. I had answered the bogus Willoughby’s advertisement. And so you kept on collecting and collecting for something more than three years. Now do you understand the charge?’

Mr Macpherson’s head during this accusation was held slightly inclined to one side. At first his face was clouded by the most clever imitation of anxious concentration of mind I had ever seen, and this was gradually cleared away by the dawn of awakening perception. When I had finished, an ingratiating smile hovered about his lips.

‘Really, you know,’ he said, ‘that is rather a capital scheme. The absent-minded league, as one might call them. Most ingenious. Summertrees, if he had any sense of humour, which he hasn’t, would be rather taken by the idea that his innocent fad for Christian Science had led him to be suspected of obtaining money under false pretences. But, really, there are no pretensions about the matter at all. As I understand it, I simply call and receive the money through the forgetfulness of the persons on my list, but where I think you would have both Summertrees and myself, if there was anything in your audacious theory, would be an indictment for conspiracy. Still, I quite see how the mistake arises. You have jumped to the conclusion that we sold nothing to Lord Semptam except that carved table three years ago. I have pleasure in pointing out to you that his lordship is a frequent customer of ours, and has had many things from us at one time or another. Sometimes he is in our debt; sometimes we are in his. We keep a sort of running contract with him by which he pays us a pound a week. He and several other customers deal on the same plan, and in return for an income that we can count upon, they get the

first offer of anything in which they are supposed to be interested. As I have told you, we call these sheets in the office our visiting lists, but to make the visiting lists complete you need what we term our encyclopaedia. We call it that because it is in so many volumes; a volume for each year, running back I don't know how long. You will notice little figures here from time to time above the amount stated on this visiting list. These figures refer to the page of the encyclopaedia for the current year, and on that page is noted the new sale, and the amount of it, as it might be set down, say, in a ledger.'

'That is a very entertaining explanation, Mr Macpherson. I suppose this encyclopaedia, as you call it, is in the shop at Tottenham Court Road?'

'Oh, no, sir. Each volume of the encyclopaedia is self-locking. These books contain the real secret of our business, and they are kept in the safe at Mr Summertrees's house in Park Lane. Take Lord Semptam's account, for instance. You will find in faint figures under a certain date, 102. If you turn to page 102 of the encyclopaedia for that year, you will then see a list of what Lord Semptam has bought, and the prices he was charged for them. It is really a very simple matter. If you will allow me to use your telephone for a moment, I will ask Mr Summertrees, who has not yet begun dinner, to bring with him here the volume for 1893, and, within a quarter of an hour, you will be perfectly satisfied that everything is quite legitimate.'

I confess that the young man's naturalness and confidence staggered me, the more so as I saw by the sarcastic smile on Hale's lips that he did not believe a single word spoken. A portable telephone stood on the table, and as Macpherson finished his explanation, he reached over and drew it towards him. Then Spenser Hale interfered.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'I'll do the telephoning. What is the call number of Mr Summertrees?'

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‘140 Hyde Park.’

Hale at once called up Central, and presently was answered from Park Lane. We heard him say,

‘Is that the residence of Mr Summertrees? Oh, is that you, Podgers? Is Mr Summertrees in? Very well. This is Hale. I am in Valmont’s flat—Imperial Flats—you know. Yes, where you went with me the other day. Very well, go to Mr Summertrees, and say to him that Mr Macpherson wants the encyclopaedia for 1893. Do you get that? Yes, encyclopaedia. Oh, he’ll understand what it is. Mr Macpherson. No, don’t mention my name at all. Just say Mr Macpherson wants the encyclopaedia for the year 1893, and that you are to bring it. Yes, you may tell him that Mr Macpherson is at Imperial Flats, but don’t mention my name at all. Exactly. As soon as he gives you the book, get into a cab, and come here as quickly as possible with it. If Summertrees doesn’t want to let the book go, then tell him to come with you. If he won’t do that, place him under arrest, and bring both him and the book here. All right. Be as quick as you can; we’re waiting.’

Macpherson made no protest against Hale’s use of the telephone; he merely sat back in his chair, with a resigned expression on his face which, if painted on canvas, might have been entitled ‘The Falsely Accused’. When Hale rang off, Macpherson said,

‘Of course you know your own business best, but if your man arrests Summertrees, he will make you the laughing-stock of London. There is such a thing as unjustifiable arrest, as well as getting money under false pretences, and Mr Summertrees is not the man to forgive an insult. And then, if you will allow me to say so, the more I think over your absent-minded theory, the more absolutely grotesque it seems, and if the case ever gets into the newspapers, I am sure, Mr Hale, you’ll experience an uncomfortable half-hour with your chiefs at Scotland Yard.’

'I'll take the risk of that, thank you,' said Hale stubbornly.

'Am I to consider myself under arrest?' inquired the young man.

'No, sir.'

'Then, if you will pardon me, I shall withdraw. Mr Summertrees will show you everything you wish to see in his books, and can explain his business much more capably than I, because he knows more about it; therefore, gentlemen, I bid you good-night.'

'No you don't. Not just yet awhile,' exclaimed Hale, rising to his feet simultaneously with the young man.

'Then I *am* under arrest,' protested Macpherson.

'You're not going to leave this room until Podgers brings that book.'

'Oh, very well,' and he sat down again.

And now, as talking is dry work, I set out something to drink, a box of cigars, and a box of cigarettes. Hale mixed his favourite brew, but Macpherson, shunning the wine of his country, contented himself with a glass of plain mineral water, and lit a cigarette. Then he awoke my high regard by saying pleasantly as if nothing had happened,

'While we are waiting, Monsieur Valmont, may I remind you that you owe me five shillings?'

I laughed, took the coin from my pocket, and paid him, whereupon he thanked me.

'Are you connected with Scotland Yard, Monsieur Valmont?' asked Macpherson, with the air of a man trying to make conversation to bridge over a tedious interval; but before I could reply, Hale blurted out,

'Not likely!'

'You have no official standing as a detective, then, Monsieur Valmont?'

'None whatever,' I replied quickly, thus getting in my oar ahead of Hale.

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‘That is a loss to our country,’ pursued this admirable young man, with evident sincerity.

I began to see I could make a good deal of so clever a fellow if he came under my tuition.

‘The blunders of our police,’ he went on, ‘are something deplorable. If they would but take lessons in strategy, say, from France, their unpleasant duties would be so much more acceptably performed, with much less discomfort to their victims.’

‘France,’ snorted Hale in derision, ‘why, they call a man guilty there until he’s proven innocent.’

‘Yes, Mr Hale, and the same seems to be the case in Imperial Flats. You have quite made up your mind that Mr Summertrees is guilty, and will not be content until he proves his innocence. I venture to predict that you will hear from him before long in a manner that may astonish you.’

Hale grunted and looked at his watch. The minutes passed very slowly as we sat there smoking, and at last even I began to get uneasy. Macpherson, seeing our anxiety, said that when he came in the fog was almost as thick as it had been the week before, and that there might be some difficulty in getting a cab. Just as he was speaking the door was unlocked from the outside, and Podgers entered, bearing a thick volume in his hand. This he gave to his superior, who turned over its pages in amazement, and then looked at the back, crying,

‘*Encyclopaedia of Sport*, 1893! What sort of a joke is this, Mr Macpherson?’

There was a pained look on Mr Macpherson’s face as he reached forward and took the book. He said with a sigh,

‘If you had allowed me to telephone, Mr Hale, I should have made it perfectly plain to Summertrees what was wanted. I might have known this mistake was liable to occur. There is an increasing demand for out-of-date books of sport, and no doubt Mr Summertrees thought this was

what I meant. There is nothing for it but to send your man back to Park Lane and tell Mr Summertrees that what we want is the locked volume of accounts for 1898, which we call the encyclopaedia. Allow me to write an order that will bring it. Oh, I'll show you what I have written before your man takes it,' he said, as Hale stood ready to look over his shoulder.

On my notepaper he dashed off a request such as he had outlined, and handed it to Hale, who read it and gave it to Podgers.

'Take that to Summertrees, and get back as quickly as possible. Have you a cab at the door?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Is it foggy outside?'

'Not so much, sir, as it was an hour ago. No difficulty about the traffic now, sir.'

'Very well, get back as soon as you can.'

Podgers saluted, and left with the book under his arm. Again the door was locked, and again we sat smoking in silence until the stillness was broken by the tinkle of the telephone. Hale put the receiver to his ear.

'Yes, this is the Imperial Flats. Yes. Valmont. Oh, yes; Macpherson is here. What? Out of what? Can't hear you. Out of print. What, the encyclopaedia's out of print? Who is that speaking? Dr Willoughby; thanks.'

Macpherson rose as if he would go to the telephone, but instead (and he acted so quietly that I did not notice what he was doing until the thing was done), he picked up the sheet which he called his visiting list, and walking quite without haste, held it in the glowing coals of the fire-place until it disappeared in a flash of flame up the chimney. I sprang to my feet indignant, but too late to make even a motion towards saving the sheet. Macpherson regarded us both with that self-deprecatory smile which had several times lighted up his face.

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‘How dare you burn that sheet?’ I demanded.

‘Because, Monsieur Valmont, it did not belong to you; because you do not belong to Scotland Yard; because you stole it; because you had no right to it; and because you have no official standing in this country. If it had been in Mr Hale’s possession I should not have dared, as you put it, to destroy the sheet, but as this sheet was abstracted from my master’s premises by you, an entirely unauthorized person, whom he would have been justified in shooting dead if he had found you housebreaking and you had resisted him on his discovery, I took the liberty of destroying the document. I have always held that these sheets should not have been kept, for, as has been the case, if they fell under the scrutiny of so intelligent a person as Eugène Valmont, improper inferences might have been drawn. Mr Summertrees, however, persisted in keeping them, but made this concession, that if I ever telegraphed him or telephoned him the word “*Encyclopaedia*”, he would at once burn these records, and he, on his part, was to telegraph or telephone to me “The *Encyclopaedia* is out of print,” whereupon I would know that he had succeeded.

‘Now, gentlemen, open this door, which will save me the trouble of forcing it. Either put me formally under arrest, or cease to resist my liberty. I am very much obliged to Mr Hale for telephoning, and I have made no protest to so gallant a host as Monsieur Valmont is, because of the locked door. However, the farce is now terminated. The proceedings I have sat through were entirely illegal, and if you will pardon me, Mr Hale, they have been a little too French to go down here in old England, or to make a report in the newspapers that would be quite satisfactory to your chiefs. I demand either my formal arrest, or the unlocking of that door.’

In silence I pressed a button, and my man threw open the door. Macpherson walked to the threshold, paused, and

looked back at Spenser Hale, who sat there silent as a sphinx.

‘Good-evening, Mr Hale.’

There being no reply, he turned to me with the same ingratiating smile.

‘Good-evening, Monsieur Eugène Valmont,’ he said, ‘I shall give myself the pleasure of calling next Wednesday at six for my five shillings.’

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mind is master of all things. When science fully recognizes that fact a great advance will have been made.'

'How about the airship?' asked Dr Ransome.

'That's not impossible at all,' asserted The Thinking Machine. 'It will be invented some time. I'd do it myself, but I'm busy.'

Dr Ransome laughed tolerantly.

'I've heard you say such things before,' he said. 'But they mean nothing. Mind may be master of matter, but it hasn't yet found a way to apply itself. There are some things that can't be *thought* out of existence, or rather which would not yield to any amount of thinking.'

'What, for instance?' demanded The Thinking Machine.

Dr Ransome was thoughtful for a moment as he smoked.

'Well, say prison walls,' he replied. 'No man can *think* himself out of a cell. If he could, there would be no prisoners.'

'A man can so apply his brain and ingenuity that he can leave a cell, which is the same thing,' snapped The Thinking Machine.

Dr Ransome was slightly amused.

'Let's suppose a case,' he said, after a moment. 'Take a cell where prisoners under sentence of death are confined—men who are desperate and, maddened by fear, would take any chance to escape—suppose you were locked in such a cell. Could you escape?'

'Certainly,' declared The Thinking Machine.

'Of course,' said Mr Fielding, who entered the conversation for the first time, 'you might wreck the cell with an explosive—but inside, a prisoner, you couldn't have that.'

'There would be nothing of that kind,' said The Thinking Machine. 'You might treat me precisely as you treated prisoners under sentence of death, and I would leave the cell.'

‘Not unless you entered it with tools prepared to get out,’ said Dr Ransome.

The Thinking Machine was visibly annoyed and his blue eyes snapped.

‘Lock me in any cell in any prison anywhere at any time, wearing only what is necessary, and I’ll escape in a week,’ he declared, sharply.

Dr Ransome sat up straight in the chair, interested. Mr Fielding lighted a new cigar.

‘You mean you could actually *think* yourself out?’ asked Dr Ransome.

‘I would get out,’ was the response.

‘Are you serious?’

‘Certainly I am serious.’

Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding were silent for a long time.

‘Would you be willing to try it?’ asked Mr Fielding, finally.

‘Certainly,’ said Professor Van Dusen, and there was a trace of irony in his voice. ‘I have done more asinine things than that to convince other men of less important truths.’

The tone was offensive and there was an under-current strongly resembling anger on both sides. Of course it was an absurd thing, but Professor Van Dusen reiterated his willingness to undertake the escape and it was decided upon.

‘To begin now,’ added Dr Ransome.

‘I’d prefer that it begin to-morrow,’ said The Thinking Machine, ‘because——’

‘No, now,’ said Mr Fielding, flatly. ‘You are arrested, figuratively, of course, without any warning locked in a cell with no chance to communicate with friends, and left there with identically the same care and attention that would be given to a man under sentence of death. Are you willing?’

‘All right, now, then,’ said The Thinking Machine, and he arose.

‘Say, the death-cell in Chisholm Prison.’

VI

The Problem of Cell 13

Jacques Futrelle

I

Practically all those letters remaining in the alphabet after Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen was named were afterwards acquired by that gentleman in the course of a brilliant scientific career, and, being honorably acquired, were tacked on to the other end. His name, therefore, taken with all that belonged to it, was a wonderfully imposing structure. He was a Ph.D., an LL.D., an F.R.S., an M.D., and an M.D.S. He was also some other things—just what he himself couldn't say—through recognition of his ability by various foreign educational and scientific institutions.

In appearance he was no less striking than in nomenclature. He was slender with the droop of the student in his thin shoulders and the pallor of a close, sedentary life on his clean-shaven face. His eyes wore a perpetual, forbidding squint—the squint of a man who studies little things—and when they could be seen at all through his thick spectacles, were mere slits of watery blue. But above his eyes was his most striking feature. This was a tall, broad brow, almost abnormal in height and width, crowned by a heavy shock

f bushy, yellow hair. All these things conspired to give him peculiar, almost grotesque, personality.

Professor Van Dusen was remotely German. For generations his ancestors had been noted in the sciences; he was the logical result, the master mind. First and above all he was a logician. At least thirty-five years of the half-century or so of his existence had been devoted exclusively to proving that two and two always equal four, except in unusual cases, where they equal three or five, as the case may be. He stood broadly on the general proposition that all things that start must go somewhere, and was able to bring the concentrated mental force of his forefathers to bear on a given problem. Incidentally it may be remarked that Professor Van Dusen wore a No. 8 hat.

The world at large had heard vaguely of Professor Van Dusen as *The Thinking Machine*. It was a newspaper catchphrase applied to him at the time of a remarkable exhibition at chess; he had demonstrated then that a stranger to the game might, by the force of inevitable logic, defeat a champion who had devoted a lifetime to its study. *The Thinking Machine*! Perhaps that more nearly described him than all his honorary initials, for he spent week after week, month after month, in the seclusion of his small laboratory from which had gone forth thoughts that staggered scientific associates and deeply stirred the world at large.

It was only occasionally that *The Thinking Machine* had visitors, and these were usually men who, themselves high in the sciences, dropped in to argue a point and perhaps convince themselves. Two of these men, Dr Charles Ransome and Alfred Fielding, called one evening to discuss some theory which is not of consequence here.

‘Such a thing is possible,’ declared Dr Ransome emphatically, in the course of the conversation.

‘Nothing is impossible,’ declared *The Thinking Machine* with equal emphasis. He always spoke petulantly ‘The

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'The death-cell in Chisholm Prison.'

'And what will you wear?'

'As little as possible,' said The Thinking Machine.
'Shoes, stockings, trousers and a shirt.'

'You will permit yourself to be searched, of course?'

'I am to be treated precisely as all prisoners are treated,' said The Thinking Machine. 'No more attention and no less.'

There were some preliminaries to be arranged in the matter of obtaining permission for the test, but all three were influential men and everything was done satisfactorily by telephone, albeit the prison commissioners, to whom the experiment was explained on purely scientific grounds, were sadly bewildered. Professor Van Dusen would be the most distinguished prisoner they had ever entertained.

When The Thinking Machine had donned those things which he was to wear during his incarceration he called the little old woman who was his housekeeper, cook and maid-servant all in one.

'Martha,' he said, 'it is now twenty-seven minutes past nine o'clock. I am going away. One week from to-night, at half-past nine, these gentlemen and one, possibly two, others will take supper with me here. Remember Dr Ransome is very fond of artichokes.'

The three men were driven to Chisholm Prison, where the Warden was awaiting them, having been informed of the matter by telephone. He understood merely that the eminent Professor Van Dusen was to be his prisoner, if he could keep him, for one week; that he had committed no crime, but that he was to be treated as all other prisoners were treated.

'Search him,' instructed Dr Ransome.

The Thinking Machine was searched. Nothing was found on him; the pockets of the trousers were empty; the white,

stiff-bosomed shirt had no pocket. The shoes and stockings were removed, examined, then replaced. As he watched all these preliminaries—the rigid search and noted the pitiful, childlike physical weakness of the man, the colourless face, and the thin, white hands—Dr Ransome almost regretted his part in the affair.

‘Are you sure you want to do this?’ he asked.

‘Would you be convinced if I did not?’ inquired The Thinking Machine in turn.

‘No.’

‘All right I’ll do it’

What sympathy Dr Ransome had was dissipated by the tone. It nettled him, and he resolved to see the experiment to the end; it would be a stinging reproof to egotism.

‘It will be impossible for him to communicate with anyone outside?’ he asked.

‘Absolutely impossible,’ replied the warden. ‘He will not be permitted writing materials of any sort.’

‘And your jailers, would they deliver a message from him?’

‘Not one word, directly or indirectly,’ said the warden. ‘You may rest assured of that. They will report anything he might say or turn over to me anything he might give them.’

‘That seems entirely satisfactory,’ said Mr Fielding, who was frankly interested in the problem.

‘Of course, in the event he fails,’ said Dr Ransome, ‘and asks for his liberty, you understand you are to set him free?’

‘I understand,’ replied the warden.

The Thinking Machine stood listening, but had nothing to say until this was all ended, then:

‘I should like to make three small requests. You may grant them or not, as you wish.’

‘No special favours, now,’ warned Mr Fielding.

‘I am asking none,’ was the stiff response. ‘I would like

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to have some tooth powder—buy it yourself to see that it is tooth powder—and I should like to have one five-dollar and two ten-dollar bills.'

Dr Ransome, Mr Fielding and the warden exchanged astonished glances. They were not surprised at the request for tooth powder, but were at the request for money.

'Is there any man with whom our friend would come in contact that he could bribe with twenty-five dollars?' asked Dr Ransome of the warden.

'Not for twenty-five hundred dollars,' was the positive reply.

'Well, let him have them,' said Mr Fielding. 'I think they are harmless enough.'

'And what is the third request?' asked Dr Ransome.

'I should like to have my shoes polished.'

Again the astonished glances were exchanged. This last request was the height of absurdity, so they agreed to it. These things all being attended to, The Thinking Machine was led back into the prison from which he had undertaken to escape.

'Here is Cell 13,' said the warden, stopping three doors down the steel corridor. 'This is where we keep condemned murderers. No one can leave it without my permission; and no one in it can communicate with the outside. I'll stake my reputation on that. It's only three doors back of my office and I can readily hear any unusual noise.'

'Will this cell do, gentlemen?' asked The Thinking Machine. There was a touch of irony in his voice.

'Admirably,' was the reply.

The heavy steel door was thrown open, there was a great scurrying and scampering of tiny feet, and The Thinking Machine passed into the gloom of the cell. Then the door was closed and double locked by the warden.

'What is that noise in there?' asked Dr Ransome, through the bars.

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'Rats—dozens of them,' replied The Thinking Machine, tersely.

The three men, with final good-nights, were turning away when The Thinking Machine called:

'What time is it exactly, warden?'

'Eleven seventeen,' replied the warden.

'Thanks. I will join you gentlemen in your office at half-past eight o'clock one week from tonight,' said The Thinking Machine.

'And if you do not?'

'There is no "if" about it.'

II

Chisholm Prison was a great, spreading structure of granite, four stories in all, which stood in the centre of acres of open space. It was surrounded by a wall of solid masonry eighteen feet high, and so smoothly finished inside and out as to offer no foothold to a climber, no matter how expert. Atop of this fence, as a further precaution, was a five-foot fence of steel rods, each terminating in a keen point. This fence in itself marked an absolute deadline between freedom and imprisonment, for, even if a man escaped from his cell, it would seem impossible for him to pass the wall.

The yard, which on all sides of the prison building was twenty-five feet wide, that being the distance from the building to the wall, was by day an exercise ground for those prisoners to whom was granted the boon of occasional semi-liberty. But that was not for those in Cell 18. At all times of the day there were armed guards in the yard, four of them, one patrolling each side of the prison building.

By night the yard was almost as brilliantly lighted as by day. On each of the four sides was a great arc light which rose above the prison wall and gave to the guards a clear

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sight. The lights, too, brightly illuminated the spiked top of the wall. The wires which fed the arc lights ran up the side of the prison building on insulators and from the top storey led out to the poles supporting the arc lights.

All these things were seen and comprehended by The Thinking Machine, who was only enabled to see out of his closely barred cell window by standing on his bed. This was on the morning following his incarceration. He gathered, too, that the river lay over there beyond the wall somewhere, because he heard faintly the pulsation of a motor boat and high up in the air saw a river bird. From that same direction came the shouts of boys at play and the occasional crack of a batted ball. He knew then that between the prison wall and the river was an open space, a playground.

Chisholm Prison was regarded as absolutely safe. No man had ever escaped from it. The Thinking Machine, from his perch on the bed, seeing what he saw, could readily understand why. The walls of the cell, though built, he judged, twenty years before, were perfectly solid, and the window bars of new iron had not a shadow of rust on them. The window itself, even with the bars out, would be a difficult mode of egress because it was small.

Yet, seeing these things, The Thinking Machine was not discouraged. Instead, he thoughtfully squinted at the great arc light—there was bright sunlight now—and traced with his eyes the wire which led from it to the building. That electric wire, he reasoned, must come down the side of the building not a great distance from his cell. That might be worth knowing.

Cell 13 was on the same floor with the offices of the prison—that is, not in the basement, nor yet upstairs. There were only four steps up to the office floor, therefore the level of the floor must be only three or four feet above the ground. He couldn't see the ground directly beneath his

window, but he could see it further out toward the wall. It would be an easy drop from the window. Well and good.

Then The Thinking Machine fell to remembering how he had come to the cell. First, there was the outside guard's booth, a part of the wall. There were two heavily barred gates, both of steel. At this gate was one man always on guard. He admitted persons to the prison after much clanking of keys and locks, and let them out when ordered to do so. The warden's office was in the prison building, and in order to reach that official from the prison yard one had to pass a gate of solid steel with only a peep-hole in it. Then coming from that inner office to Cell 13, where he was now, one must pass a heavy wooden door and two steel doors into the corridors of the prison; and always there was the double-locked door of Cell 13 to reckon with.

There were then, The Thinking Machine recalled, seven doors to be overcome before one could pass from Cell 13 into the outer world, a free man. But against this was the fact that he was rarely interrupted. A jailer appeared at his cell door at six in the morning with a breakfast of prison fare; he would come again at noon, and again at six in the afternoon. At nine o'clock at night would come the inspection tour. That would be all.

'It's admirably arranged, this prison system,' was the mental tribute paid by The Thinking Machine. 'I'll have to study it a little when I get out. I had no idea there was such great care exercised in the prisons.'

There was nothing, positively nothing, in his cell, except his iron bed, so firmly put together that no man could tear it to pieces save with sledges or a file. He had neither of these. There was not even a chair, or a small table, or a bit of tin or crockery. Nothing! The jailer stood by when he ate, then took away the wooden spoon and bowl which he had used.

One by one these things sank into the brain of The Think-

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ing Machine. When the last possibility had been considered he began an examination of his cell. From the roof, down the walls on all sides, he examined the stones and the cement between them. He stamped over the floor carefully time after time, but it was cement, perfectly solid. After the examination he sat on the edge of the iron bed and was lost in thought for a long time. For Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine, had something to think about.

He was disturbed by a rat, which ran across his foot, then scampered away into a dark corner of the cell, frightened at its own daring. After a while The Thinking Machine, squinting steadily into the darkness of the corner where the rat had gone, was able to make out in the gloom many little beady eyes staring at him. He counted six pair, and there were perhaps others; he didn't see very well.

Then The Thinking Machine, from his seat on the bed, noticed for the first time the bottom of his cell door. There was an opening there of two inches between the steel bar and the floor. Still looking steadily at this opening, The Thinking Machine backed suddenly into the corner where he had seen the beady eyes. There was a great scampering of tiny feet, several squeaks of frightened rodents, and then silence.

None of the rats had gone out the door, yet there were none in the cell. Therefore there must be another way out of the cell, however small. The Thinking Machine, on hands and knees, started a search for this spot, feeling in the darkness with his long, slender fingers.

At last his search was rewarded. He came upon a small opening in the floor, level with the cement. It was perfectly round and somewhat larger than a silver dollar. This was the way the rats had gone. He put his fingers deep into the opening; it seemed to be a disused drainage pipe and was dry and dusty.

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Having satisfied himself on this point, he sat on the bed again for an hour, then made another inspection of his surroundings through the small cell window. One of the outside guards stood directly opposite, beside the wall, and happened to be looking at the window of Cell 13 when the head of The Thinking Machine appeared. But the scientist didn't notice the guard.

Noon came and the jailer appeared with the prison dinner of repulsively plain food. At home The Thinking Machine merely ate to live; here he took what was offered without comment. Occasionally he spoke to the jailer who stood outside the door watching him.

'Any improvements made here in the last few years?' he asked.

'Nothing particularly,' replied the jailer. 'New wall was built four years ago.'

'Anything done to the prison proper?'

'Painted the woodwork outside, and I believe about seven years ago a new system of plumbing was put in.'

'Ah!' said the prisoner. 'How far is the river over there?'

'About three hundred feet. The boys have a baseball ground between the wall and the river.'

The Thinking Machine had nothing further to say just then, but when the jailer was ready to go he asked for some water.

'I get very thirsty here,' he explained. 'Would it be possible for you to leave a little water in a bowl for me?'

'I'll ask the warden,' replied the jailer, and he went away.

Half an hour later he returned with water in a small earthenware bowl.

'The warden says you may keep this bowl,' he informed the prisoner. 'But you must show it to me when I ask for it. If it is broken, it will be the last.'

'Thank you,' said The Thinking Machine. 'I shan't break it.'

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The jailer went on about his duties. For just the fraction of a second it seemed that The Thinking Machine wanted to ask a question, but he didn't.

Two hours later this same jailer, in passing the door of Cell 13, heard a noise inside and stopped. The Thinking Machine was down on his hands and knees in a corner of the cell, and from that same corner came several frightened squeaks. The jailer looked on interestedly.

'Ah, I've got you,' he heard the prisoner say.

'Got what?' he asked, sharply.

'One of these rats,' was the reply. 'See?' And between the scientist's long fingers the jailer saw a small gray rat struggling. The prisoner brought it over to the light and looked at it closely. 'It's a water rat,' he said.

'Ain't you got anything better to do than to catch rats?' asked the jailer.

'It's disgraceful that they should be here at all,' was the irritated reply. 'Take this one away and kill it. There are dozens more where it came from.'

The jailer took the wriggling, squirming rodent and flung it down on the floor violently. It gave one squeak and lay still. Later he reported the incident to the warden, who only smiled.

Still later that afternoon the outside armed guard on Cell 13 side of the prison looked up again at the window and saw the prisoner looking out. He saw a hand raised to the barred window and then something white fluttered to the ground, directly under the window of Cell 13. It was a little roll of linen, evidently of white shirting material, and tied around it was a five-dollar bill. The guard looked up at the window again, but the face had disappeared.

With a grim smile he took the little linen roll and the five-dollar bill to the warden's office. There together they deciphered something which was written on it with a queer sort of ink, frequently blurred. On the outside was this:

'Finder of this please deliver to Dr Charles Ransome.'

'Ah,' said the warden, with a chuckle. 'Plan of escape number one has gone wrong.' Then, as an afterthought: 'But why did he address it to Dr Ransome?'

'And where did he get the pen and ink to write with?' asked the guard.

The warden looked at the guard and the guard looked at the warden. There was no apparent solution of that mystery. The warden studied the writing carefully, then shook his head.

'Well, let's see what he was going to say to Dr Ransome,' he said at length, still puzzled, and he unrolled the inner piece of linen.

'Well, if that—what—what do you think of that?' he asked, dazed.

The guard took the bit of linen and read this:

'Epa cseot d'net niyy awe htto n'si sih. "T."'

III

The warden spent an hour wondering what sort of a cipher it was, and half an hour wondering why his prisoner should attempt to communicate with Dr Ransome, who was the cause of him being there. After this the warden devoted some thought to the question of where the prisoner got writing materials, and what sort of writing materials he had. With the idea of illuminating this point, he examined the linen again. It was a torn part of a white shirt and had ragged edges.

Now it was possible to account for the linen, but what the prisoner had used to write with was another matter. The warden knew it would have been impossible for him to have either pen or pencil, and, besides, neither pen nor pencil had been used in this writing. What, then? The warden

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decided to personally investigate. The Thinking Machine was his prisoner; he had orders to hold his prisoners; if this one sought to escape by sending cipher messages to persons outside, he would stop it, as he would have stopped it in the case of any other prisoner.

The warden went back to Cell 13 and found The Thinking Machine on his hands and knees on the floor, engaged in nothing more alarming than catching rats. The prisoner heard the warden's step and turned to him quickly.

'It's disgraceful,' he snapped, 'these rats. There are scores of them.'

'Other men have been able to stand them,' said the warden. 'Here is another shirt for you—let me have the one you have on.'

'Why?' demanded The Thinking Machine, quickly. His tone was hardly natural, his manner suggested actual perturbation.

'You have attempted to communicate with Dr Ransome,' said the warden severely. 'As my prisoner, it is my duty to put a stop to it.'

The Thinking Machine was silent for a moment.

'All right,' he said, finally, 'Do your duty.'

The warden smiled grimly. The prisoner arose from the floor and removed the white shirt, putting on instead a striped convict shirt the warden had brought. The warden took the white shirt eagerly, and then and there compared the pieces of linen on which was written the cipher with certain torn places in the shirt. The Thinking Machine looked on curiously.

'The guard brought *you* those, then?' he asked.

'He certainly did,' replied the warden triumphantly. 'And that ends your first attempt to escape.'

The Thinking Machine watched the warden as he, by comparison, established to his own satisfaction that only two pieces of linen had been torn from the white shirt.

'What did you write this with?' demanded the warden. 'I should think it a part of your duty to find out.' said The Thinking Machine, irritably.

The warden started to say some harsh things, then restrained himself and made a minute search of the cell and of the prisoner instead. He found absolutely nothing; not even a match or toothpick which might have been used for a pen. The same mystery surrounded the fluid with which the cipher had been written. Although the warden left Cell 13 visibly annoyed, he took the torn shirt in triumph

'Well, writing notes on a shirt won't get him out, that's certain,' he told himself with some complacency. He put the linen scraps into his desk to await developments. 'If that man escapes from that cell I'll—hang it—I'll resign.'

On the third day of his incarceration The Thinking Machine openly attempted to bribe his way out. The jailer had brought his dinner and was leaning against the barred door, waiting, when The Thinking Machine began the conversation.

'The drainage pipes of the prison lead to the river, don't they?' he asked.

'Yes,' said the jailer.

'I suppose they are very small?'

'Too small to crawl through, if that's what you're thinking about,' was the grinning response.

There was silence until The Thinking Machine finished his meal. Then:

'You know I'm not a criminal, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'And that I've a perfect right to be freed if I demand it?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I came here believing that I could make my escape,' said the prisoner, and his squint eyes studied the

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face of the jailer. 'Would you consider a financial reward for aiding me to escape?'

The jailer, who happened to be an honest man, looked at the slender, weak figure of the prisoner, at the large head with its mass of yellow hair, and was almost sorry.

'I guess prisons like these were not built for the likes of you to get out of,' he said, at last.

'But would you consider a proposition to help me get out?' the prisoner insisted, almost beseechingly.

'No,' said the jailer, shortly.

'Five hundred dollars,' urged The Thinking Machine. 'I am not a criminal.'

'No,' said the jailer.

'A thousand?'

'No,' again said the jailer, and he started away hurriedly to escape further temptation. Then he turned back. 'If you should give me ten thousand dollars I couldn't let you out. You'd have to pass through seven doors, and I only have the keys to two.'

Then he told the warden all about it.

'Plan number two fails,' said the warden, smiling grimly. 'First a cipher, then bribery.'

When the jailer was on his way to Cell 13 at six o'clock, again bearing food to The Thinking Machine, he paused, startled by the unmistakable scrape, scrape of steel against steel. It stopped at the sound of his steps, then craftily the jailer, who was beyond the prisoner's range of vision, resumed his tramping, the sound being apparently that of a man going away from Cell 13. As a matter of fact he was in the same spot

After a moment there came again the steady scrape, scrape, and the jailer crept cautiously on tip-toes to the door and peered between the bars. The Thinking Machine was standing on the iron bed working at the bars of the

Jacques Futrelle

little window. He was using a file, judging from the backward and forward swing of his arms.

Cautiously the jailer crept back to the office, summoned the warden in person, and they returned to Cell 13 on tip-toes. The steady scrape was still audible. The warden listened to satisfy himself and then suddenly appeared at the door.

'Well?' he demanded, and there was a smile on his face.

The Thinking Machine glanced back from his perch on the bed and leaped suddenly to the floor, making frantic efforts to hide something. The warden went in, with hand extended.

'Give it up,' he said.

'No,' said the prisoner, sharply.

'Come, give it up,' urged the warden. 'I don't want to have to search you again.'

'No,' repeated the prisoner.

'What was it, a file?' asked the warden.

The Thinking Machine was silent and stood squinting at the warden with something very nearly approaching disappointment on his face—nearly, but not quite. The warden was almost sympathetic.

'Plan number three fails, eh?' he asked, good-naturedly. 'Too bad, isn't it?'

The prisoner didn't say.

'Search him,' instructed the warden.

The jailer searched the prisoner carefully. At last, artfully concealed in the waist band of the trousers, he found a piece of steel about two inches long, with one side curved like a half moon.

'Ah,' said the warden, as he received it from the jailer. 'From your shoe heel,' and he smiled pleasantly.

The jailer continued his search and on the other side of the trouser's waist band found another piece of steel identical

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with the first. The edges showed where they had been worn against the bars of the window.

‘You couldn’t saw a way through those bars with these,’ said the warden.

‘I could have,’ said The Thinking Machine firmly.

‘In six months, perhaps,’ said the warden, good-naturedly.

The warden shook his head slowly as he gazed into the slightly flushed face of his prisoner.

‘Ready to give it up?’ he asked.

‘I haven’t started yet,’ was the prompt reply.

Then came another exhaustive search of the cell. Carefully the two men went over it, finally turning out the bed and searching that. Nothing. The warden in person climbed upon the bed and examined the bars of the window where the prisoner had been sawing. When he looked he was amused.

‘Just made it a little bright by hard rubbing,’ he said to the prisoner, who stood looking on with a somewhat crest-fallen air. The warden grasped the iron bars in his strong hands and tried to shake them. They were immovable, set firmly in the solid granite. He examined each in turn and found them all satisfactory. Finally he climbed down from the bed.

‘Give it up, professor,’ he advised.

The Thinking Machine shook his head and the warden and jailer passed on again. As they disappeared down the corridor The Thinking Machine sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands.

‘He’s crazy to try to get out of that cell,’ commented the jailer.

‘Of course he can’t get out,’ said the warden. ‘But he’s clever. I would like to know what he wrote that cipher with.’

* * *

It was four o'clock next morning when an awful, heart-racking shriek of terror resounded through the great prison. It came from a cell, somewhere about the centre, and its tone told a tale of horror, agony, terrible fear. The warden heard and with three of his men rushed into the long corridor leading to Cell 13.

IV

As they ran there came again that awful cry. It died away in a sort of wail. The white faces of prisoners appeared at cell doors upstairs and down, staring out wonderingly, frightened.

'It's that fool in Cell 13,' grumbled the warden.

He stopped and stared in as one of the jailers flashed a lantern. 'That fool in Cell 13' lay comfortably on his cot, flat on his back with his mouth open, snoring. Even as they looked there came again the piercing cry, from somewhere above. The warden's face blanched a little as he started up the stairs. There on the top floor he found a man in Cell 43, directly above Cell 13, but two floors higher, cowering in a corner of his cell.

'What's the matter?' demanded the warden.

'Thank God you've come,' exclaimed the prisoner, and he cast himself against the bars of his cell.

'What is it?' demanded the warden again.

He threw open the door and went in. The prisoner dropped on his knees and clasped the warden about the body. His face was white with terror, his eyes were widely distended, and he was shuddering. His hands, icy cold, clutched at the warden's.

'Take me out of this cell, please take me out,' he pleaded.

'What's the matter with you, anyhow?' insisted the warden impatiently.

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'I heard something—something,' said the prisoner, and his eyes roved nervously around the cell.

'What did you hear?'

'I—I can't tell you,' stammered the prisoner. Then, in a sudden burst of terror: 'Take me out of this cell—put me anywhere—but take me out of here.'

The warden and the three jailers exchanged glances.

'Who is this fellow? What's he accused of?' asked the warden.

'Joseph Ballard,' said one of the jailers. 'He's accused of throwing acid in a woman's face. She died from it.'

'But they can't prove it,' gasped the prisoner. 'They can't prove it. Please put me in some other cell.'

He was still clinging to the warden, and that official threw his arms off roughly. Then for a time he stood looking at the cowering wretch, who seemed possessed of all the wild, unreasoning terror of a child.

'Look here, Ballard,' said the warden, finally, 'if you heard anything, I want to know what it was. Now tell me.'

'I can't, I can't,' was the reply. He was sobbing.

'Where did it come from?'

'I don't know. Everywhere—nowhere. I just heard it.'

'What was it—a voice?'

'Please don't make me answer,' pleaded the prisoner.

'You must answer,' said the warden, sharply.

'It was a voice—but—but it wasn't human,' was the sobbing reply.

'Voice, but not human?' repeated the warden, puzzled.

'It sounded muffled and—and far away—and ghostly,' explained the man.

'Did it come from inside or outside the prison?'

'It didn't seem to come from anywhere—it was just here, here, everywhere. I heard it. I heard it.'

For an hour the warden tried to get the story, but Ballard had become suddenly obstinate and would say noth-

ing—only pleaded to be placed in another cell, or to have one of the jailers remain near him until daylight. These requests were gruffly refused.

‘And see here,’ said the warden, in conclusion, ‘if there’s any more of this screaming I’ll put you in the padded cell.’

Then the warden went his way, a sadly puzzled man. Ballard sat at his cell door until daylight, his face, drawn and white with terror, pressed against the bars, and looking out into the prison with wide, staring eyes.

That day, the fourth since the incarceration of The Thinking Machine, was enlivened considerably by the volunteer prisoner, who spent most of his time at the little window of his cell. He began proceedings by throwing another piece of linen down to the guard, who picked it up dutifully and took it to the warden. On it was written:

‘Only three days more.’

The warden was in no way surprised at what he read; he understood that The Thinking Machine meant only three days more of his imprisonment, and he regarded the note as a boast. But how was the thing written? Where had The Thinking Machine found this new piece of linen? Where? How? He carefully examined the linen. It was white, of fine texture, shirting material. He took the shirt which he had taken and carefully fitted the two original pieces of the linen to the torn places. This third piece was entirely superfluous; it didn’t fit anywhere, and yet it was unmistakably the same goods.

‘And where—where does he get anything to write with?’ demanded the warden of the world at large.

Still later on the fourth day The Thinking Machine, through the window of his cell, spoke to the armed guard outside.

‘What day of the month is it?’ he asked.

‘The fifteenth,’ was the answer.

The Thinking Machine made a mental astronomical cal-

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culatation and satisfied himself that the moon would not rise until after nine o'clock that night. Then he asked another question:

'Who attends to those arc lights?'

'Man from the company.'

'You have no electricians in the building?'

'No.'

'I should think you could save money if you had your own man.'

'None of my business,' replied the guard.

The guard noticed The Thinking Machine at the cell window frequently during that day, but always the face seemed listless and there was a certain wistfulness in the squint eyes behind the glasses. After a while he accepted the presence of the leonine head as a matter of course. He had seen other prisoners do the same thing; it was the longing for the outside world.

That afternoon, just before the day guard was relieved, the head appeared at the window again, and The Thinking Machine's hand held something out between the bars. It fluttered to the ground and the guard picked it up. It was a five-dollar bill.

'That's for you,' called the prisoner.

As usual, the guard took it to the warden. That gentleman looked at it suspiciously; he looked at everything that came from Cell 13 with suspicion.

'He said it was for me,' explained the guard.

'It's a sort of tip, I suppose,' said the warden. I see no particular reason why you shouldn't accept—'

Suddenly he stopped. He had remembered that The Thinking Machine had gone into Cell 13 with one five-dollar bill and two ten-dollar bills; twenty-five dollars in all. Now a five-dollar bill had been tied around the first pieces of linen that came from the cell. The warden still had it, and to convince himself he took it out and looked at it. It was

five dollars; yet here was another five dollars, and The Thinking Machine had only had ten-dollar bills.

‘Perhaps somebody changed one of the bills for him,’ he thought at last, with a sigh of relief.

But then and there he made up his mind. He would search Cell 13 as a cell was never before searched in this world. When a man could write at will, and change money, and do other wholly inexplicable things, there was something radically wrong with his prison. He planned to enter the cell at night—three o’clock would be an excellent time. The Thinking Machine must do all the weird things he did sometime. Night seemed the most reasonable.

Thus it happened that the warden stealthily descended upon Cell 13 that night at three o’clock. He paused at the door and listened. There was no sound save the steady, regular breathing of the prisoner. The keys unfastened the double locks with scarcely a clank, and the warden entered, locking the door behind him. Suddenly he flashed his dark-lantern in the face of the recumbent figure.

If the warden had planned to startle The Thinking Machine he was mistaken, for that individual merely opened his eyes quietly, reached for his glasses and inquired, in a most matter-of-fact tone:

‘Who is it?’

It would be useless to describe the search that the warden made. It was minute. Not one inch of the cell or the bed was overlooked. He found the round hole in the floor, and with a flash of inspiration thrust his thick fingers into it. After a moment of fumbling there he drew up something and looked at it in the light of his lantern.

‘Ugh!’ he exclaimed.

The thing he had taken out was a rat—a dead rat. His inspiration fled as a mist before the sun. But he continued the search. The Thinking Machine, without a word, arose and kicked the rat out of the cell into the corridor.

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The warden climbed on the bed and tried the steel bars on the tiny window. They were perfectly rigid; every bar of the door was the same.

Then the warden searched the prisoner's clothing, beginning at the shoes. Nothing hidden in them! Then the trousers' waist band. Still nothing! Then the pockets of the trousers. From one side he drew out some paper money and examined it.

'Five one-dollar bills,' he gasped.

'That's right,' said the prisoner.

'But the—you had two tens and a five—what the—how do you do it?'

'That's my business,' said The Thinking Machine.

'Did any of my men change this money for you—on your word of honour?'

The Thinking Machine paused just a fraction of a second.

'No,' he said.

'Well, do you make it?' asked the warden. He was prepared to believe anything.

'That's my business,' again said the prisoner.

The warden glared at the eminent scientist fiercely. He felt—he knew—that this man was making a fool of him, yet he didn't know how. If he were a real prisoner he would get the truth—but, then, perhaps, those inexplicable things which had happened would not have been brought before him so sharply. Neither of the men spoke for a long time, then suddenly the warden turned fiercely and left the cell, slamming the door behind him. He didn't dare to speak, then.

He glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes to four. He had hardly settled himself in bed when again came that heart-breaking shriek through the prison. With a few muttered words, which, while not elegant, were highly expressive, he relighted his lantern and rushed through the prison again to the cell on the upper floor.

Again Ballard was crushing himself against the steel door, shrieking, shrieking at the top of his voice. He stopped only when the warden flashed his lamp in the cell.

‘Take me out, take me out,’ he screamed. ‘I did it, I did it, I killed her. Take it away.’

‘Take what away?’ asked the warden.

‘I threw the acid in her face—I did it—I confess. Take me out of here.’

Ballard’s condition was pitiable; it was only an act of mercy to let him out into the corridor. There he crouched in a corner, like an animal at bay, and clasped his hands to his ears. It took half an hour to calm him sufficiently for him to speak. Then he told incoherently what had happened. On the night before at four o’clock he had heard a voice—a sepulchral voice, muffled and wailing in tone.

‘What did it say?’ asked the warden, curiously.

‘Acid—acid—acid!’ gasped the prisoner. ‘It accused me. Acid! I threw the acid, and the woman died. Oh!’ It was a long shuddering wail of terror.

‘Acid?’ echoed the warden, puzzled. The case was beyond him.

‘Acid. That’s all I heard—that one word, repeated several times. There were other things, too, but I didn’t hear them’

‘That was last night, eh?’ asked the warden. ‘What happened to-night—what frightened you just now?’

‘It was the same thing,’ gasped the prisoner. ‘Acid—acid—acid!’ He covered his face with his hands and sat shivering. ‘It was acid I used on her, but I didn’t mean to kill her. I just heard the words. It was something accusing me—accusing me.’ He mumbled, and was silent.

‘Did you hear anything else?’

‘Yes—but I couldn’t understand—only a little bit—just a word or two.’

‘Well, what was it?’

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'I heard "acid" three times, then I heard a long, moaning sound, then—then—I heard "No. 8 hat." I heard that twice.'

'No. 8 hat,' repeated the warden. 'What the devil—No. 8 hat? Accusing voices of conscience have never talked about No. 8 hats, so far as I ever heard.'

'He's insane,' said one of the jailers, with an air of finality.

'I believe you,' said the warden. 'He must be. He probably heard something and got frightened. He's trembling now. No. 8 hat! What the——'

V

When the fifth day of The Thinking Machine's imprisonment rolled around the warden was wearing a hunted look. He was anxious for the end of the thing. He could not help but feel that his distinguished prisoner had been amusing himself. And if this were so, The Thinking Machine had lost none of his sense of humour. For on this fifth day he flung down another linen note to the outside guard, bearing the words; 'Only two days more.' Also he flung down half a dollar.

Now the warden knew—he *knew*—that the man in Cell 13 didn't have any half dollars—he *couldn't* have any half dollars, no more than he could have pen and ink and linen, and yet he did have them. It was a condition, not a theory; that is one reason why the warden was wearing a hunted look.

That ghastly, uncanny thing, too, about 'Acid' and 'No. 8 hat' clung to him tenaciously. They didn't mean anything, of course, merely the ravings of an insane murderer who had been driven by fear to confess his crime, still there

were so many things that 'didn't mean anything' happening in the prison now since The Thinking Machine was there.

On the sixth day the warden received a postal stating that Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding would be at Chisholm Prison on the following evening, Thursday, and in the event Professor Van Dusen had not yet escaped—and they presumed he had not because they had not heard from him—they would meet him there.

'In the event he had not yet escaped!' The warden smiled grimly. Escaped!

The Thinking Machine enlivened this day for the warden with three notes. They were on the usual linen and bore generally on the appointment at half-past eight o'clock Thursday night, which appointment the scientist had made at the time of his imprisonment.

On the afternoon of the seventh day the warden passed Cell 18 and glanced in. The Thinking Machine was lying on the iron bed, apparently sleeping lightly. The cell appeared precisely as it always did from a casual glance. The warden would swear that no man was going to leave it between that hour—it was then four o'clock—and half-past eight o'clock that evening.

On his way back past the cell the warden heard the steady breathing again, and coming close to the door looked in. He wouldn't have done so if The Thinking Machine had been looking, but now—well, it was different.

A ray of light came through the high window and fell on the face of the sleeping man. It occurred to the warden for the first time that his prisoner appeared haggard and weary. Just then The Thinking Machine stirred slightly and the warden hurried on up the corridor guiltily. That evening after six o'clock he saw the jailer.

'Everything all right in Cell 18?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' replied the jailer. 'He didn't eat much, though.'

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It was with a feeling of having done his duty that the warden received Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding shortly after seven o'clock. He intended to show them the linen notes and lay before them the full story of his woes, which was a long one. But before this came to pass the guard from the river side of the prison yard entered the office.

'The arc light on my side of the yard won't light,' he informed the warden.

'Confound it, that man's a hoodoo,' thundered the official. 'Everything has happened since he's been here.'

The guard went back to his post in the darkness, and the warden 'phoned to the electric light company.

'This is Chisholm Prison,' he said through the 'phone. 'Send three or four men down here quick, to fix an arc light.'

The reply was evidently satisfactory, for the warden hung up the receiver and passed out into the yard. While Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding sat waiting the guard at the outer gate came in with a special delivery letter. Dr Ransome happened to notice the address, and, when the guard went out, looked at the letter more closely.

'By George!' he exclaimed.

'What is it?' asked Mr Fielding.

Silently the doctor offered the letter. Mr Fielding examined it closely.

'Coincidence,' he said. 'It must be.'

It was nearly eight o'clock when the warden returned to his office. The electricians had arrived in a wagon, and were now at work. The warden pressed the buzz-button communicating with the man at the outer gate in the wall.

'How many electricians came in?' he asked, over the short 'phone. 'Four? Three workmen in jumpers and overalls and the manager? Frock coat and silk hat? All right. Be certain that only four go out. That's all.'

He turned to Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding.

'We have to be careful here—particularly,' and there was broad sarcasm in his tone, 'since we have scientists locked up.'

The warden picked up the special delivery letter carelessly, and then began to open it.

'When I have read this I want to tell you gentlemen something about how—Great Caesar!' he ended, suddenly, as he glanced at the letter. He sat with mouth open, motionless, from astonishment.

'What is it?' asked Mr Fielding.

'A special delivery letter from Cell 13,' gasped the warden. 'An invitation to supper.'

'What?' and the two others arose, unanimously.

The warden sat dazed, staring at the letter for a moment, then called sharply to a guard outside in the corridor.

'Run down to Cell 13 and see if that man's in there.'

The guard went as directed, while Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding examined the letter.

'It's Van Dusen's handwriting; there's no question of that,' said Dr Ransome. 'I've seen too much of it.'

Just then the buzz on the telephone from the outer gate sounded, and the warden, in a semi-trance, picked up the receiver.

'Hello! Two reporters, eh? Let 'em come in.' He turned suddenly to the doctor and Mr Fielding. 'Why, the man *can't* be out. He must be in his cell.'

Just at that moment the guard returned.

'He's still in his cell, sir,' he reported. 'I saw him. He's lying down.'

'There, I told you so,' said the warden, and he breathed freely again. 'But how did he mail that letter?'

There was a rap on the steel door which led from the jail yard into the warden's office.

'It's the reporters,' said the warden. 'Let them in,' he instructed the guard; then to the other two gentlemen:

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'Don't say anything about this before them, because I'd never hear the last of it.'

The door opened, and the two men from the front gate entered.

'Good-evening, gentlemen,' said one. That was Hutchinson Hatch; the warden knew him well.

'Well?' demanded the other, irritably, 'I'm here.'

That was The Thinking Machine.

He squinted belligerently at the warden, who sat with mouth agape. For the moment that official had nothing to say. Dr Ransome and Mr Fielding were amazed, but they didn't know what the warden knew. They were only amazed; he was paralyzed. Hutchinson Hatch, the reporter, took in the scene with greedy eyes.

'How—how—how did you do it?' gasped the warden, finally.

'Come back to the cell,' said The Thinking Machine, in the irritated voice which his scientific associates knew so well.

The warden, still in a condition bordering on trance, led the way.

'Flash your light in there,' directed The Thinking Machine.

The warden did so. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the cell, and there—there on the bed lay the figure of The Thinking Machine. Certainly! There was the yellow hair! Again the warden looked at the man beside him and wondered at the strangeness of his own dreams.

With trembling hands he unlocked the cell door and The Thinking Machine passed inside.

'See here,' he said.

He kicked at the steel bars in the bottom of the cell door and three of them were pushed out of place. A fourth broke off and rolled away in the corridor.

'And here, too,' directed the erstwhile prisoner as he

stood on the bed to reach the small window. He swept his hand across the opening and every bar came out.

'What's this in the bed?' demanded the warden, who was slowly recovering.

'A wig,' was the reply. 'Turn down the cover.'

The warden did so. Beneath it lay a large coil of strong rope, thirty feet or more, a dagger, three files, ten feet of electric wire, a thin, powerful pair of steel pliers, a small tack hammer with its handle, and—and a Derringer pistol.

'How did you do it?' demanded the warden.

'You gentlemen have an engagement to supper with me at half-past nine o'clock,' said The Thinking Machine.

'Come on, or we shall be late.'

'But how did you do it?' insisted the warden.

'Don't ever think you can hold any man who can use his brain,' said The Thinking Machine. 'Come on; we shall be late.'

VI

It was an impatient supper party in the rooms of Professor Van Dusen and a somewhat silent one. The guests were Dr Ransome, Albert Fielding, the warden, and Hutchinson Hatch, reporter. The meal was served to the minute, in accordance with Professor Van Dusen's instructions of one week before; Dr Ransome found the artichokes delicious. At last the supper was finished and The Thinking Machine turned full on Dr Ransome and squinted at him fiercely.

'Do you believe it now?' he demanded.

'I do,' replied Dr Ransome.

'Do you admit that it was a fair test?'

'I do.'

With the others, particularly the warden, he was waiting anxiously for the explanation.

'Suppose you tell us how—' began Mr Fielding.

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‘Yes, tell us how,’ said the warden.

The Thinking Machine readjusted his glasses, took a couple of preparatory squints at his audience, and began the story. He told it from the beginning logically; and no man ever talked to more interested listeners.

‘My agreement was,’ he began, ‘to go into a cell, carrying nothing except what was necessary to wear, and to leave that cell within a week. I had never seen Chisholm Prison. When I went into the cell I asked for tooth powder, two ten and one five-dollar bills, and also to have my shoes blacked. Even if these requests had been refused it would not have mattered seriously. But you agreed to them.

‘I knew there would be nothing in the cell which you thought I might use to advantage. So when the warden locked the door on me I was apparently helpless, unless I could turn three seemingly innocent things to use. They were things which would have been permitted any prisoner under sentence of death, were they not, warden?’

‘Tooth powder and polished shoes, but not money,’ replied the warden.

‘Anything is dangerous in the hands of a man who knows how to use it,’ went on The Thinking Machine. ‘I did nothing that first night but sleep and chase rats.’ He glared at the warden. ‘When the matter was broached I knew I could do nothing that night, so suggested next day. You gentlemen thought I wanted time to arrange an escape with outside assistance, but this was not true. I knew I could communicate with whom I pleased, when I pleased.’

The warden stared at him a moment, then went on smoking solemnly.

‘I was aroused next morning at six o’clock by the jailer with my breakfast,’ continued the scientist. ‘He told me dinner was at twelve and supper at six. Between these times, I gathered I would be pretty much to myself. So immediately after breakfast I examined my outside surroundings from

my cell window. One look told me it would be useless to try to scale the wall, even should I decide to leave my cell by the window, for my purpose was to leave not only the cell, but the prison. Of course, I could have gone over the wall, but it would have taken me longer to lay my plans that way. Therefore, for the moment, I dismissed all idea of that.

‘From this first observation I knew the river was on that side of the prison, and that there was also a playground there. Subsequently these surmises were verified by a keeper. I knew then one important thing—that anyone might approach the prison wall from that side if necessary without attracting any particular attention. That was well to remember. I remembered it.

‘But the outside thing which most attracted my attention was the feed wire to the arc light which ran within a few feet—probably three or four—of my cell window. I knew that would be valuable in the event I found it necessary to cut off that arc light.’

‘Oh, you shut it off tonight, then?’ asked the warden.

‘Having learned all I could from that window,’ resumed The Thinking Machine, without heeding the interruption, ‘I considered the idea of escaping through the prison proper. I recalled just how I had come into the cell, which I knew would be the only way. Seven doors lay between me and the outside. So, also for the time being, I gave up the idea of escaping that way. And I couldn’t go through the solid granite walls of the cell.’

The Thinking Machine paused for a moment and Dr Ransome lighted a new cigar. For several minutes there was silence, then the scientific jail-breaker went on:

‘While I was thinking about these things a rat ran across my foot. It suggested a new line of thought. There were at least half a dozen rats in the cell—I could see their beady eyes. Yet I had noticed none come under the cell door. I

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frightened them purposely and watched the cell door to see if they went out that way. They did not, but they were gone. Obviously they went another way. Another way meant another opening.

‘I searched for this opening and found it. It was an old drain pipe, long unused and partly choked with dirt and dust. But this was the way the rats had come. They came from somewhere. Where? Drain pipes usually lead outside prison grounds. This one probably led to the river, or near it. The rats must therefore come from that direction. If they came a part of the way, I reasoned that they came all the way, because it was extremely unlikely that a solid iron or lead pipe would have any hole in it except at the exit.

‘When the jailer came with my luncheon he told me two important things, although he didn’t know it. One was that a new system of plumbing had been put in the prison seven years before; another that the river was only three hundred feet away. Then I knew positively that the pipe was a part of an old system; I knew, too, that it slanted generally toward the river. But did the pipe end in the water or on land?

‘This was the next question to be decided. I decided it by catching several of the rats in the cell. My jailer was surprised to see me engaged in this work. I examined at least a dozen of them. They were perfectly dry; they had come through the pipe, and, most important of all, they were *not house rats, but field rats*. The other end of the pipe was on land, then, outside the prison walls. So far, so good.

‘Then, I knew that if I worked freely from this point I must attract the warden’s attention in another direction. You see, by telling the warden that I had come there to escape you made the test more severe, because I had to trick him by false scents.’

The warden looked up with a sad expression in his eyes.

‘The first thing was to make him think I was trying to

communicate with you, Dr Ransome. So I wrote a note on a piece of linen I tore from my shirt, addressed it to Dr Ransome, tied a five-dollar bill around it and threw it out of the window. I knew the guard would take it to the warden but I rather hoped the warden would send it as addressed. Have you that first linen note, warden?’

The warden produced the cipher.

‘What the deuce does it mean, anyhow?’ he asked.

‘Read it backwards, beginning with the “T” signature and disregard the division into words,’ instructed The Thinking Machine.

The warden did so.

‘T-h-i-s, this,’ he spelled, studied it a moment, then read it off, grinning:

‘This is not the way I intend to escape.’

‘Well, now what do you think o’ that?’ he demanded, still grinning.

‘I knew that would attract your attention, just as it did,’ said The Thinking Machine, ‘and if you really found out what it was it would be a sort of gentle rebuke.’

‘What did you write it with?’ asked Dr Ransome, after he had examined the linen and passed it to Mr Fielding.

‘This,’ said the erstwhile prisoner, and he extended his foot. On it was the shoe he had worn in prison, though the polish was gone—scraped off clean. ‘The shoe blacking, moistened with water, was my ink; the metal tip of the shoe lace made a fairly good pen.’

The warden looked up and suddenly burst into a laugh, half of relief, half of amusement.

‘You’re a wonder,’ he said, admiringly. ‘Go on.’

‘That precipitated a search of my cell by the warden, as I had intended,’ continued The Thinking Machine. ‘I was anxious to get the warden into the habit of searching my cell, so that finally, constantly finding nothing, he would get disgusted and quit. This at last happened, practically.’

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The warden blushed.

'He then took my white shirt away and gave me a prison shirt. He was satisfied that those two pieces of the shirt were all that was missing. But while he was searching my cell I had another piece of that same shirt, about nine inches square, rolled up into a small ball in my mouth.'

'Nine inches of that shirt?' demanded the warden. 'Where did it come from?'

'The bosoms of all stiff white shirts are of triple thickness,' was the explanation. 'I tore out the inside thickness, leaving the bosom only two thicknesses. I knew you wouldn't see it. So much for that.'

There was a little pause, and the warden looked from one to another of the men with a sheepish grin.

'Having disposed of the warden for the time being by giving him something else to think about, I took my first serious step toward freedom,' said Professor Van Dusen. 'I knew, within reason, that the pipe led somewhere to the playground outside; I knew a great many boys played there; I knew that rats came into my cell from out there. Could I communicate with some one outside with these things at hand?

'First was necessary, I saw, a long and fairly reliable thread, so—but here,' he pulled up his trouser legs and showed that the tops of both stockings, of fine, strong lisle, were gone. 'I unravelled those—after I got them started it wasn't difficult—and I had easily a quarter of a mile of thread I could depend on.'

'Then on half of my remaining linen I wrote, laboriously enough I assure you, a letter explaining my situation to this gentleman here,' and he indicated Hutchinson Hatch. 'I knew he would assist me—for the value of the newspaper story. I tied firmly to this linen letter a ten-dollar bill—there is no surer way of attracting the eye of anyone—and wrote on the linen: "Finder of this deliver to Hutchinson

Hatch, *Daily American*, who will give another ten dollars for the information."

'The next thing was to get this note outside on that playground where a boy might find it. There were two ways, but I chose the best. I took one of the rats—I became adept in catching them—tied the linen and money firmly to one leg, fastened my lisle thread to another, and turned him loose in the drain pipe. I reasoned that the natural fright of the rodent would make him run until he was outside the pipe and then out on earth he would probably stop to gnaw off the linen and money.

'From the moment the rat disappeared into that dusty pipe I became anxious. I was taking so many chances. The rat might gnaw the string, of which I held one end; other rats might gnaw it; the rat might run out of the pipe and leave the linen and money where they would never be found; a thousand other things might have happened. So began some nervous hours, but the fact that the rat ran on until only a few feet of the string remained in my cell made me think he was outside the pipe. I had carefully instructed Mr Hatch what to do in case the note reached him. The question was: would it reach him?

'This done, I could only wait and make other plans in case this one failed. I openly attempted to bribe my jailer, and learned from him that he held the keys to only two of seven doors between me and freedom. Then I did something else to make the warden nervous. I took the steel supports out of the heels of my shoes and made a pretence of sawing the bars of my cell window. The warden raised a pretty row about that. He developed, too, the habit of shaking the bars of my cell window to see if they were solid. They were—then.'

Again the warden grinned. He had ceased being astonished.

'With this one plan I had done all I could and could only

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wait to see what happened,' the scientist went on. 'I couldn't know whether my note had been delivered or even found, or whether the rat had gnawed it up. And I didn't dare to draw back through the pipe that one slender thread which connected me with the outside.

'When I went to bed that night I didn't sleep, for fear there would come the slight signal twitch at the thread which was to tell me that Mr Hatch had received the note. At half-past three o'clock, I judge, I felt this twitch, and no prisoner actually under sentence of death ever welcomed a thing more heartily.'

The Thinking Machine stopped and turned to the reporter.

'You'd better explain just what you did,' he said.

'The linen note was brought to me by a small boy who had been playing baseball,' said Mr Hatch. 'I immediately saw a big story in it, so I gave the boy another ten dollars, and got several spools of silk, some twine, and a roll of light, pliable wire. The professor's note suggested that I have the finder of the note show me just where it was picked up, and told me to make my search from there, beginning at two o'clock in the morning. If I found the other end of the thread I was to twitch it gently three times, then a fourth.

'I began the search with a small bulb electric light. It was an hour and twenty minutes before I found the end of the drain pipe, half hidden in weeds. The pipe was very large there, say twelve inches across. Then I found the end of the lisle thread, twitched it as directed and immediately I got an answering twitch.

'Then I fastened the silk to this and Professor Van Dusen began to pull it into his cell. I nearly had heart disease for fear the string would break. To the end of the silk I fastened the twine, and when that had been pulled in I tied on the wire. Then that was drawn into the pipe and

we had a substantial line, which rats couldn't gnaw, from the mouth of the drain into the cell.'

The Thinking Machine raised his hand and Hatch stopped.

'All this was done in absolute silence,' said the scientist. 'But when the wire reached my hand I could have shouted. Then we tried another experiment, which Mr Hatch was prepared for. I tested the pipe as a speaking tube. Neither of us could hear very clearly, but I dared not speak loud for fear of attracting attention in the prison. At last I made him understand what I wanted immediately. He seemed to have great difficulty in understanding when I asked for nitric acid, and I repeated the word "acid" several times.

'Then I heard a shriek from a cell above me. I knew instantly that some one had overheard, and when I heard you coming, Mr Warden, I feigned sleep. If you had entered my cell at that moment the whole plan of escape would have ended there. But you passed on. That was the nearest I ever came to being caught.

'Having established this improvised trolley it is easy to see how I got things in the cell and made them disappear at will. I merely dropped them back into the pipe. You, Mr Warden, could not have reached the connecting wire with your fingers; they are too large. My fingers, you see, are longer and more slender. In addition I guarded the top of that pipe with a rat—you remember how.'

'I remember,' said the warden, with a grimace.

'I thought that if any one were tempted to investigate that hole the rat would dampen his ardour. Mr Hatch could not send me anything useful through the pipe until next night, although he did send me change for ten dollars as a test, so I proceeded with other parts of my plan. Then I evolved the method of escape, which I finally employed.

'In order to carry this out successfully it was necessary for the guard in the yard to get accustomed to seeing me at

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the cell window. I arranged this by dropping linen notes to him, boastful in tone, to make the warden believe, if possible, one of his assistants was communicating with the outside for me. I would stand at my window for hours gazing out, so the guard could see, and occasionally I spoke to him. In that way I learned that the prison had no electricians of its own, but was dependent upon the lighting company if anything should go wrong.

‘That cleared the way to freedom perfectly. Early in the evening of the last day of my imprisonment, when it was dark, I planned to cut the feed wire which was only a few feet from my window, reaching it with an acid-tipped wire I had. That would make that side of the prison perfectly dark while the electricians were searching for the break. That would also bring Mr Hatch into the prison yard.

‘There was only one more thing to do before I actually began the work of setting myself free. This was to arrange final details with Mr Hatch through our speaking tube. I did this within half an hour after the warden left my cell on the fourth night of my imprisonment. Mr Hatch again had serious difficulty in understanding me, and I repeated the word “acid” to him several times, and later the words: “Number eight hat”—that’s my size—and these were the things which made a prisoner upstairs confess to murder, so one of the jailers told me next day. This prisoner heard our voices, confused of course, through the pipe, which also went to his cell. The cell directly over me was not occupied, hence no one else heard.

‘Of course the actual work of cutting the steel bars out of the window and door was comparatively easy with nitric acid, which I got through the pipe in thin bottles, but it took time. Hour after hour on the fifth and sixth and seventh days the guard below was looking at me as I worked on the bars of the window with the acid on a piece of wire. I used the tooth powder to prevent the acid spreading. I looked

away abstractedly as I worked and each minute the acid cut deeper into the metal. I noticed that the jailers always tried the door by shaking the upper part, never the lower bars, therefore I cut the lower bars, leaving them hanging in place by thin strips of metal. But that was a bit of daredevilry. I could not have gone that way so easily.'

The Thinking Machine sat silently for several minutes.

'I think that makes everything clear,' he went on. 'Whatever points I have not explained were merely to confuse the warden and jailers. These things in my bed I brought in to please Mr Hatch, who wanted to improve the story. Of course, the wig was necessary in my plan. The special delivery letter I wrote and directed in my cell with Mr Hatch's fountain pen, then sent it out to him and he mailed it. That's all, I think.'

'But your actually leaving the prison grounds and then coming in through the outer gate to my office?' asked the warden.

'Perfectly simple,' said the scientist. 'I cut the electric light wire with acid, as I said, when the current was off. Therefore when the current was turned on the arc didn't light. I knew it would take some time to find out what was the matter and make repairs. When the guard went to report to you the yard was dark, I crept out the window—it was a tight fit, too—replaced the bars by standing on a narrow ledge and remained in a shadow until the force of electricians arrived. Mr Hatch was one of them.

'When I saw him I spoke and he handed me a cap, a jumper and overalls, which I put on within ten feet of you, Mr Warden, while you were in the yard. Later Mr Hatch called me, presumably as a workman, and together we went out the gate to get something out of the wagon. The gate guard let us pass out readily as two workmen who had just passed in. We changed our clothing and reappeared, asking to see you. We saw you. That's all.'

Arsène Lupin in Prison

a little too suddenly. The ruined owners of the Malaquis were compelled to sell the abode of their ancestors to him for a song. Here he installed his wonderful collections of pictures and furniture, of pottery and carvings. He lives here alone, with three old servants. No one ever enters the doors. No one has ever beheld, in the setting of those ancient halls, his three Rubens, his two Watteaus, his pulpit carved by Jean Goujon and all the other marvels snatched by force of money from before the eyes of the wealthiest frequenters of the public sale-rooms.

Baron Satan leads a life of fear. He is afraid not for himself, but for the treasures which he has accumulated with so tenacious a passion and with the perspicacity of a collector whom not the most cunning of dealers can boast of having ever taken in. He loves his curiosities with all the greed of a miser, with all the jealousy of a lover.

Daily, at sunset, the four iron-barred doors that command both ends of the bridge and the entrance to the principal court are locked and bolted. At the least touch, electric bells would ring through the surrounding silence. There is nothing to be feared on the side of the Seine, where the rock rises sheer from the water.

One Friday in September, the postman appeared as usual at the bridge-head. And, in accordance with his daily rule, the baron himself opened the heavy door.

He examined the man as closely as if he had not for years known that good jolly face and those crafty peasant eyes. And the man said, with a laugh:

‘It’s me all right, monsieur le baron. It’s not another chap in my cap and blouse!’

‘One never knows!’ muttered Cahorn.

The postman handed him a bundle of newspapers. Then he added:

‘And now, monsieur le baron, I have something special for you.’

‘Something special? What do you mean?’

‘A letter . . . and a registered letter at that!’

Living cut off from everybody, with no friends nor any one that took an interest in him, the baron never received letters; and this suddenly struck him as an ill-omened event which gave him good cause for nervousness. Who was the mysterious correspondent that came to worry him in his retreat?

‘I shall want your signature, monsieur le baron.’

He signed the receipt, cursing as he did so. Then he took the letter, waited until the postman had disappeared round the turn of the road and, after taking a few steps to and fro, leaned against the parapet of the bridge and opened the envelope. It contained a sheet of ruled paper, headed, in writing:

‘*Prison de la Santé, Paris.*’

He looked at the signature:

‘ARSÈNE LUPIN.’

Utterly dumbfounded, he read:

MONSIEUR LE BARON,

In the gallery that connects your two drawing-rooms there is a picture by Philippe de Champaigne, an excellent piece of work, which I admire greatly. I also like your Rubens pictures and the smaller of your two Watteaus. In the drawing-room on the right, I note the Louis XIII credence-table, the Beauvais tapestries, the Empire stand, signed by Jacob, and the Renaissance chest. In the room on the left, the whole of the case of trinkets and miniatures.

This time, I will be satisfied with these objects, which, I think, can be easily turned into cash. I will therefore ask you to have them properly packed and to send them to my name, carriage paid, to the Gare de Bati-gnolles, on or before this day week, failing which I will

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myself see to their removal on the night of Wednesday the 27th instant. In the latter case, as is only fair, I shall not be content with the above-mentioned objects.

Pray excuse the trouble which I am giving you, and believe me to be

Yours very truly,

ARSÈNE LUPIN

P.S.—Be sure not to send me the larger of the two Watteaus. Although you paid thirty thousand francs for it at the sale-rooms, it is only a copy, the original having been burnt under the Directory, by Barras, in one of his orgies. See Garat's unpublished Memoirs.

I do not care either to have the Louis XVI chatelaine, the authenticity of which appears to me to be exceedingly doubtful.

This letter thoroughly upset Baron Cahorn. It would have alarmed him considerably had it been signed by any other hand. But signed by Arsène Lupin! . . .

He was a regular reader of the newspapers, knew of everything that went on in the way of theft and crime and had heard all about the exploits of the infernal house-breaker. He was quite aware that Lupin had been arrested in America by his enemy, Ganimard; that he was safely under lock and key; and that the preliminaries of his trial were now being conducted . . . with great difficulty, no doubt! But he also knew that one could always expect anything of Arsène Lupin. Besides, this precise knowledge of the castle, of the arrangement of the pictures and furniture, was a very formidable sign. Who had informed Lupin of things which nobody had ever seen?

The baron raised his eyes and gazed at the frowning outline of the Malaquis, its abrupt pedestal, the deep water that surrounds it. He shrugged his shoulders. No, there was

no possible danger. No one in the world could penetrate to the inviolable sanctuary that contained his collections.

No one in the world, perhaps; but Arsène Lupin? Did doors, draw-bridges, walls so much as exist for Arsène Lupin? Of what use were the most ingeniously contrived obstacles, the most skilful precautions, once that Arsène Lupin had decided to attain a given object? . . .

That same evening, he wrote to the public prosecutor at Rouen. He enclosed the threatening letter and demanded police protection.

The reply came without delay: the said Arsène Lupin was at that moment a prisoner at the Santé, where he was kept under strict observation and not allowed to write. The letter, therefore, could only be the work of a hoaxer. Everything went to prove this: logic, common sense and the actual facts. However, to make quite sure, the letter had been submitted to a handwriting expert, who declared that, notwithstanding certain points of resemblance, it was not in the prisoner's writing.

'Notwithstanding certain points of resemblance.' The baron saw only these five bewildering words, which he regarded as the confession of a doubt which alone should have been enough to justify the intervention of the police. His fears increased. He read the letter over and over again. 'I will myself see to their removal.' And that fixed date, the night of Wednesday the 27th of September!

Of a naturally suspicious and silent disposition, he dared not unburden himself to his servants, whose devotion he did not consider proof against all tests. And yet, for the first time for many years, he felt a need to speak, to take advice. Abandoned by the police of his country, he had no hope of protecting himself by his own resources and thought of going to Paris to beg for the assistance of some retired detective or other.

Two days elapsed. On the third day, as he sat reading his

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camp-stool, fishing, in the same spot as before. The baron handed him the telegram without a word.

‘Well?’ said the detective.

‘Well what? It’s fixed for to-morrow!’

‘What is?’

‘The burglary! The theft of my collections!’

Ganimard turned to him, and, folding his arms across his chest, cried, in a tone of impatience:

‘Why, you don’t really mean to say that you think I’m going to trouble myself about this stupid business?’

‘What fee will you take to spend Wednesday night at the castle?’

‘Not a penny. Don’t bother me!’

‘Name your own price. I’m a rich man, a very rich man.’

The brutality of the offer took Ganimard aback. He replied, more calmly

‘I am here on leave and I have no right to. . . .’

‘No one shall know. I undertake to be silent, whatever happens!’

‘Oh, nothing will happen!’

‘Well, look here; is three thousand francs enough?’

The inspector took a pinch of snuff, reflected and said

‘Very well. But it’s only fair to tell you that you are throwing your money away.’

‘I don’t mind.’

‘In that case. . . . And besides, after all, one can never tell, with that devil of a Lupin! He must have a whole gang at his orders. . . . Are you sure of your servants?’

‘Well, I. . . .’

‘Then we must not rely upon them. I’ll wire to two of my own men; that will make us feel safer. . . . And, now, leave me; we must not be seen together. To-morrow evening, at nine o’clock.’

On the morning of the next day, the date fixed by Arsène

Lupin, Baron Cahorn took down his trophy of arms, polished up his pistols and made a thorough inspection of the Malaquis, without discovering anything suspicious.

At half-past eight in the evening, he dismissed his servants for the night. They slept in a wing facing the road, but set a little way back and right at the end of the castle. As soon as he was alone, he softly opened the four doors. In a little while, he heard footsteps approaching.

Ganimard introduced his assistants, two powerfully-built fellows, with bull necks and huge, strong hands, and asked for certain explanations. After ascertaining the disposition of the place, he carefully closed and barricaded every issue by which the threatened rooms could be entered. He examined the walls, lifted up the tapestries and finally installed his detectives in the central gallery 'No nonsense, do you understand? You're not here to sleep. At the least sound, open the windows on the court and call me. Keep a look-out also on the water side. Thirty feet of steep cliff doesn't frighten scoundrels of that stamp.'

He locked them in, took away the keys and said to the baron:

'And now to our post.'

He had selected, as the best place in which to spend the night, a small room contrived in the thickness of the outer walls, between the two main doors. It had at one time been the watchman's lodge. A spy-hole opened upon the bridge, another upon the court. In one corner was what looked like the mouth of a well.

'You told me, did you not, monsieur le baron, that this well is the only entrance to the underground passage and that it has been stopped up since the memory of man?'

'Yes.'

'Therefore, unless there should happen to be another outlet, unknown to any but Arsène Lupin, which seems pretty unlikely, we can be easy in our minds.'

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He placed three chairs in a row, settled himself comfortably at full length, lit his pipe and sighed:

‘Upon my word, monsieur le baron, I must be very eager to build an additional storey to the little house in which I mean to end my days, to accept so elementary a job as this. I shall tell the story to our friend Lupin; he’ll split his sides with laughter.’

The baron did not laugh. With ears pricked up, he questioned the silence with ever-growing restlessness. From time to time, he leaned over the well and plunged an anxious eye into the yawning cavity.

The clock struck eleven; midnight; one o’clock.

Suddenly, he seized the arm of Ganimard, who woke with a start:

‘Do you hear that?’

‘Yes.’

‘What is it?’

‘It’s myself, snoring!’

‘No, no, listen. . . .’

‘Oh yes, it’s a motor-horn.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, it’s as unlikely that Lupin should come by motor-car as that he should use a battering-ram to demolish your castle. So I should go to sleep, if I were you, monsieur le baron . . . as I shall have the honour of doing once more. Good-night!’

This was the only alarm. Ganimard resumed his interrupted slumbers; and the baron heard nothing save his loud and regular snoring.

At break of day, they left their cell. A great calm peace, the peace of the morning by the cool waterside, reigned over the castle. Cahorn, beaming with joy, and Ganimard, placid as ever, climbed the staircase. Not a sound. Nothing suspicious.

‘What did I tell you, monsieur le baron? I really ought not to have accepted . . . I feel ashamed of myself. . . .’

He took the keys and entered the gallery.

On two chairs, with bent bodies and hanging arms, sat the two detectives, fast asleep.

‘What, in the name of all the . . .’ growled the inspector.

At the same moment, the baron uttered a cry:

‘The pictures! . . . The credence-table!’

He stammered and spluttered, with his hand outstretched towards the dismantled walls, with their bare nails and slack cords. The Watteau and the two Rubens had disappeared! The tapestries had been removed, the glass cases emptied of their trinkets!

‘And my Lous XVI sconces! . . . And the Regency chandelier! . . . And my twelfth-century Virgin! . . .’

He ran from place to place, maddened, in despair. Distraught with rage and grief, he quoted the purchase-prices, added up his losses, piled up figures, all promiscuously, in indistinct words and incomplete phrases. He stamped his feet, flung himself about and, in short, behaved like a ruined man who had nothing before him but suicide.

If anything could have consoled him, it would have been the sight of Ganimard’s stupefaction. Contrary to the baron, the inspector did not move. He seemed petrified, and with a dazed eye, examined things. The windows? They were fastened. The locks of the doors? Untouched. There was not a crack in the ceiling, not a hole in the floor. Everything was in perfect order. The whole thing must have been carried out methodically, after an inexorable and logical plan.

‘Arsène Lupin . . . Arsène Lupin,’ he muttered, giving way.

Suddenly, he leapt upon the two detectives, as though at last overcome with rage, and shook them and swore at them furiously. They did not wake up!

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At the same moment, the baron uttered a cry:

‘The pictures! . . . The credence-table!’

He stammered and spluttered, with his hand outstretched towards the dismantled walls, with their bare nails and slack cords. The Watteau and the two Rubens had disappeared! The tapestries had been removed, the glass cases emptied of their trinkets!

‘And my Louis XVI sconces! . . . And the Regency chandelier! . . . And my twelfth-century Virgin! . . .’

He ran from place to place, maddened, in despair. Distraught with rage and grief, he quoted the purchase-prices, added up his losses, piled up figures, all promiscuously, in indistinct words and incomplete phrases. He stamped his feet, flung himself about and, in short, behaved like a ruined man who had nothing before him but suicide.

If anything could have consoled him, it would have been the sight of Ganimard’s stupefaction. Contrary to the baron, the inspector did not move. He seemed petrified, and with a dazed eye, examined things. The windows? They were fastened. The locks of the doors? Untouched. There was not a crack in the ceiling, not a hole in the floor. Everything was in perfect order. The whole thing must have been carried out methodically, after an inexorable and logical plan.

‘Arsène Lupin . . . Arsène Lupin,’ he muttered, giving way.

Suddenly, he leapt upon the two detectives, as though at last overcome with rage, and shook them and swore at them furiously. They did not wake up!

Arsène Lupin in Prison

He placed three chairs in a row, settled himself comfortably at full length, lit his pipe and sighed:

‘Upon my word, monsieur le baron, I must be very eager to build an additional storey to the little house in which I mean to end my days, to accept so elementary a job as this. I shall tell the story to our friend Lupin; he’ll split his sides with laughter.’

The baron did not laugh. With ears pricked up, he questioned the silence with ever-growing restlessness. From time to time, he leaned over the well and plunged an anxious eye into the yawning cavity.

The clock struck eleven; midnight; one o’clock.

Suddenly, he seized the arm of Ganimard, who woke with a start:

‘Do you hear that?’

‘Yes.’

‘What is it?’

‘It’s myself, snoring!’

‘No, no, listen. . . .’

‘Oh yes, it’s a motor-horn.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, it’s as unlikely that Lupin should come by motor-car as that he should use a battering-ram to demolish your castle. So I should go to sleep, if I were you, monsieur le baron . . . as I shall have the honour of doing once more. Good-night!’

This was the only alarm. Ganimard resumed his interrupted slumbers; and the baron heard nothing save his loud and regular snoring.

At break of day, they left their cell. A great calm peace, the peace of the morning by the cool waterside, reigned over the castle. Cahorn, beaming with joy, and Ganimard, placid as ever, climbed the staircase. Not a sound. Nothing

'The deuce!' he said. 'Can they have been...'

He bent over them and scrutinised them closely, one after the other: they were both asleep, but their sleep was not natural. He said to the baron:-

'They have been drugged.'

'But by whom?'

'By him, of course... or by his gang, acting under his instructions. It's a trick in his own manner. I recognize his touch.'

'In that case, I am undone: the thing is hopeless.'

'Hopeless.'

'But this is abominable; it's monstrous.'

'Lodge an information.'

'What's the good?'

'Well, you may as well try... the law has its resources....'

'The law! But you can see for yourself... Why, at this very moment, when you might be looking for a clue, discovering something, you're not even stirring!'

'Discover something, with Arsène Lupin! But, my dear sir, Arsène Lupin never leaves anything behind him! There's no chance with Arsène Lupin! I am beginning to wonder whether he got himself arrested by me of his own free will, in America!'

'Then I must give up the hope of recovering my pictures or anything! But he has stolen the pearls of my collection. I would give a fortune to get them back. If there's nothing to be done against him, let him name his price.'

Ganimard looked at him steadily:

'That's a sound notion. Do you stick to it?'

'Yes, yes, yes! But why do you ask?'

'I have an idea.'

'What idea?'

'We'll talk of it if nothing comes of the enquiry... Only, not a word about me, to a soul, if you wish me to succeed.'

And he added, between his teeth :

‘Besides, I have nothing to be proud of.’

The two men gradually recovered consciousness, with the stupefied look of men awakening from an hypnotic sleep. They opened astounded eyes, tried to make out what had happened. Ganimard questioned them. They remembered nothing.

‘Still you must have seen somebody?’

‘No, nobody.’

‘Try and think?’

‘No, nobody.’

‘Did you have a drink?’

They reflected and one of them replied :

‘Yes, I had some water.’

‘Out of that bottle there?’

‘Yes.’

‘I had some too,’ said the other.

Ganimard smelt the water, tasted it. It had no particular scent or flavour.

‘Come’, he said, ‘we are wasting our time. Problems set by Arsène Lupin can’t be solved in five minutes. But, by Jingo, I swear I’ll catch him! He’s won the second bout. The rubber game to me!’

That day, a charge of aggravated larceny was brought by Baron Cahorn against Arsène Lupin, a prisoner awaiting trial at the Santé.

The baron often regretted having laid his information when he saw the Malaquis made over to the gendarmes, the public prosecutor, the examining magistrate, the newspaper-reporters and all the inquisitive who worm themselves in wherever they have no business to be.

Already the case was filling the public mind. It had taken place under such peculiar conditions and the name of Arsène Lupin excited men’s imaginations to such a pitch that the

Arsène Lupin in Prison

most fantastic stories crowded the columns of the press and found acceptance with the public.

But the original letter of Arsène Lupin, which was published in the *Echo de France*—and no one ever knew who had supplied the text—the letter in which Baron Cahorn was insolently warned of what threatened him, caused the greatest excitement. Fabulous explanations were offered forthwith. The old legends were revived. The newspapers reminded their readers of the existence of the famous subterranean passages. And the public prosecutor, influenced by these statements, pursued his search in that direction.

The castle was ransacked from top to bottom. Every stone was examined; the wainscotings and chimneys, the frames of the mirrors and the rafters of the ceilings were carefully inspected. By the light of torches, the searchers investigated the immense cellars in which the lords of the Malaquis had been used to pile up their provisions and munitions of war. They sounded the very bowels of the rock. All to no purpose. They discovered not the slightest trace of a tunnel. No secret passage existed.

Very well, was the answer on every side; but pictures and furniture don't vanish like ghosts. They go out through doors and windows; and the people that take them also go in and out through doors and windows. Who are these people? How did they get in? And how did they get out?

The public prosecutor of Rouen, persuaded of his own incompetence, asked for the assistance of the Paris police. M. Dudouis, the chief of the detective-service, sent the most efficient bloodhounds in his employ. He himself paid a forty-eight hours' visit to the Malaquis, but met with no greater success.

It was after his return that he sent for Chief-inspector Ganimard, whose services he had so often had occasion to value.

Ganimard listened in silence to the instructions of his superior and then, tossing his head, said :

‘I think we shall be on a false scent so long as we continue to search the castle. The solution lies elsewhere.’

‘With Arsène Lupin? If you think that, then you believe that he took part in the burglary.’

‘I do think so. I go further, I consider it certain.’

‘Come, Ganimard, this is absurd. Arsène Lupin is in prison.’

‘Arsène Lupin is in prison, I agree. He is being watched, I grant you. But, if he had his legs in irons, his hands bound and his mouth gagged, I should still be of the same opinion.’

‘But why this persistency?’

‘Because no one else is capable of contriving a plan on so large a scale and of contriving it in such a way that it succeeds . . . as this has succeeded.’

‘Words, Ganimard!’

‘They are true words, for all that. Only, it’s no use looking for underground passages, for stones that turn on a pivot and stuff and nonsense of that kind. Our friend does not employ such antiquated measures. He is a man of to-day, or rather of to-morrow.’

‘And what do you conclude?’

‘I conclude by asking you straight to let me spend an hour with Lupin.’

‘In his cell?’

‘Yes. We were on excellent terms during the crossing from America and I venture to think that he is not without friendly feeling for the man who arrested him. If he can tell me what I want to know, without compromising himself, he will be quite willing to spare me an unnecessary journey.’

It was just after mid-day when Ganimard was shown into Arsène Lupin’s cell. Lupin, who was lying on his bed, raised his head and uttered an exclamation of delight :

‘Well, this is a surprise! Dear old Ganimard here!’

‘Himself.’

‘I have hoped for many things in this retreat of my own choosing, but for none more eagerly than the pleasure of welcoming you here.’

‘You are too good.’

‘Not at all, not at all. I have the liveliest regard for you.’

‘I am proud to hear it.’

‘I have said it a thousand times: Ganimard is our greatest detective. He’s *almost*—see how frank I am—*almost* as clever as Holmlock Shears. But, really, I’m awfully sorry to have nothing better than this stool to offer you. And not a drink of any kind! Not so much as a glass of beer! Do forgive me: I am only just passing through town, you see!’

Ganimard smiled and sat down on the stool; and the prisoner, glad of the opportunity of speaking, continued:

‘By Jove, what a treat to see a decent man’s face! I am sick of the looks of all these spies who go through my cell and my pockets ten times a day to make sure that I am not planning an escape. Gad, how fond the government must be of me!’

‘They show their judgment.’

‘No, no! I should be so happy if they would let me lead my own quiet life.’

‘On other people’s money.’

‘Just so. It would be so simple. But I’m letting my tongue run on, I’m talking nonsense and I daresay you’re in a hurry. Come, Ganimard, tell me to what I owe the honour of this visit.’

‘The Cahorn case,’ said Ganimard, abruptly.

‘Stop! Wait a bit . . . You see, I have so many on hand! First, let me search my brain for the Cahorn pigeonhole. . . . Ah, I have it! Cahorn case, Château du Malaquis, Seine-Inférieure. . . . Two Rubens, a Watteau and a few minor trifles.’

‘Trifles!’

‘Oh, yes, all this is of small importance. I have bigger things on hand. However, you’re interested in the case and that’s enough for me. . . . Go ahead, Ganimard.’

‘I need not tell you, need I, how far we have got with the investigation?’

‘No, not at all. I have seen the morning papers. And I will even take the liberty of saying that you are not making much progress.’

‘That’s just why I have come to throw myself upon your kindness.’

‘I am entirely at your service.’

‘First of all, the thing was done by you, was it not?’

‘From start to finish.’

‘The registered letter? The telegram?’

‘Were sent by yours truly. In fact, I ought to have the receipts somewhere.’

Arsène opened the drawer of a little deal table which, with the bed and the stool, composed all the furniture of his cell, took out two scraps of paper and handed them to Ganimard.

‘Hullo!’ cried the latter. ‘Why, I thought you were being kept under constant observation and searched on the slightest pretext. And it appears that you read the papers and collect post-office receipts. . . .’

‘Bah! Those men are such fools. They rip up the lining of my waistcoat, explore the soles of my boots, listen at the walls of my cell; but not one of them would believe that Arsène Lupin could be such a fool as to choose so obvious a hiding-place. That’s just what I reckoned on.’

Ganimard exclaimed, in amusement

‘What a funny chap you are! You’re beyond me. Come, tell me the story.’

‘Oh, I say! Not so fast! Initiate you into all my secrets . . . reveal my little tricks to you? That’s a serious matter.’

Arsène Lupin in Prison

‘Was I wrong in thinking that I could rely on you to oblige me?’

‘No, Ganimard, and, as you insist upon it. . . .’

Arsène Lupin took two or three strides across his cell. Then, stopping:

‘What do you think of my letter to the baron?’ he asked.

‘I think you wanted to have some fun, to tickle the gallery a bit.’

‘Ah, there you go! Tickle the gallery, indeed! Upon my word, Ganimard, I gave you credit for more sense! Do you really imagine that I, Arsène Lupin, waste my time with such childish pranks as that? Is it likely that I should have written the letter, if I could have rifled the baron without it? Do try and understand that the letter was the indispensable starting-point, the main-spring that set the whole machine in motion. Look here, let us proceed in order and, if you like, prepare the Malaquis burglary together.’

‘Very well.’

‘Now follow me. I have to do with an impregnable and closely-guarded castle. . . . Am I to throw up the game and forego the treasures which I covet, because the castle that contains them happens to be inaccessible?’

‘Clearly not.’

‘Am I to try to carry it by assault as in the old days, at the head of a band of adventurers?’

‘That would be childish.’

‘Am I to enter it by stealth?’

‘Impossible.’

‘There remains only one way, which is to get myself invited by the owner of the foresaid castle.’

‘It’s an original idea.’

‘And so easy! Suppose that, one day, the said owner receives a letter warning him of a plot hatched against him by one Arsène Lupin, a notorious housebreaker. What is he sure to do?’

‘Send the letter to the public prosecutor.’

‘Who will laugh at him, *because the said Lupin is actually under lock and key*. The natural consequence is the utter bewilderment of the worthy man, who is ready and anxious to ask for the assistance of the first-comer. Am I right?’

‘Quite so.’

‘And, if he happens to read in the local rag that a famous detective is staying in the neighbourhood . . . ?’

‘He will go and apply to that detective.’

‘Exactly. But, on the other hand, let us assume that, foreseeing this inevitable step, Arsène Lupin has asked one of his ablest friends to take up his quarters at Caudebec, to pick up acquaintance with a contributor to the *Réveil*, a paper, mark you, to which the baron subscribes, and to drop a hint that he is so-and-so, the famous detective. What will happen next?’

‘The contributor will send a paragraph to the *Réveil* stating that the detective is staying at Caudebec.’

‘Exactly; and one of two things follows; either the fish—I mean Cahorn—does not rise to the bait, in which case nothing happens. Or else—and this is the more likely presumption—he nibbles, in which case you have our dear Cahorn imploring the assistance of one of my own friends against me!’

‘This is becoming more and more original.’

‘Of course, the sham detective begins by refusing. Thereupon, a telegram from Arsène Lupin. Dismay of the baron, who renews his entreaties with my friend and offers him so much to watch over his safety. The friend aforesaid accepts and brings with him two chaps of our gang, who, during the night, while Cahorn is kept in sight by his protector, remove a certain number of things through the window and lower them with ropes into a barge freighted for the purpose. It’s as simple as . . . Lupin.’

‘And it’s just wonderful,’ cried Ganimard, ‘and I have

no words in which to praise the boldness of the idea and the ingenuity of the details. But I can hardly imagine a detective so illustrious that his name should have attracted and impressed the baron to that extent.'

'There is one and one only.'

'Who?'

'The most illustrious of them all, the arch-enemy of Arsène Lupin, in short, Inspector Ganimard.'

'What, myself?'

'Yourself, Ganimard. And that's the delightful part of it: if you go down and persuade the baron to talk, he will end by discovering that it is your duty to arrest yourself, just as you arrested me in America. A humorous revenge, what? I shall have Ganimard arrested by Ganimard!'

Arsène Lupin laughed loud and long, while the inspector bit his lips with vexation. The joke did not appear to him worthy of so much merriment.

The entrance of a warder gave him time to recover. The man brought the meal which Arsène Lupin, by special favour, was allowed to have sent in from the neighbouring restaurant. After placing the tray on the table, he went away. Arsène sat down, broke his bread, ate a mouthful or two and continued:

'But be easy, my dear Ganimard, you won't have to go. I have something to tell you that will strike you dumb. The Cahorn case is about to be withdrawn.'

'What!'

'About to be withdrawn, I said.'

'Nonsense! I have just left the chief.'

'And then? Does Monsieur Dudouis know more than I do about my concerns? You must learn that Ganimard—excuse me—that the sham Ganimard remained on very good terms with Baron Cahorn. The baron—and this is his main reason for keeping the thing quiet—charged him with the very delicate mission of negotiating a deal with me; and

the chances are that, by this time, on payment of a certain sum, the baron is once more in possession of his pet knick-knacks. In return for which he will withdraw the charge. Wherefore there is no question of theft. Wherefore the public prosecutor will have to abandon. . . .’

Ganimard gazed at the prisoner with an air of stupefaction:

‘But how do you know all this?’

‘I have just received the telegram I was expecting.’

‘You have just received a telegram?’

‘This very moment, my friend. I was too polite to read it in your presence. But, if you will allow me. . . .’

‘You’re poking fun at me, Lupin.’

‘Have the kindness, my friend, to cut off the top of that egg, gently. You will see for yourself that I am not poking fun at you.’

Ganimard obeyed mechanically and broke the egg with the blade of a knife. A cry of surprise escaped him. The shell was empty but for a sheet of blue paper. At Arsène’s request, he unfolded it. It was a telegram, or rather a portion of a telegram from which the postal indications had been removed. He read

‘Arrangement settled. Hundred thousand paid over, delivered. All well.’

‘Hundred thousand paid over?’ he uttered:

‘Yes, a hundred thousand francs. It’s not much, but these are hard times. . . . And my general expenses are so heavy! If you knew the amount of my budget. . . . it’s like the budget of a big town!’

Ganimard rose to go. His ill-humour had left him. He thought for a few moments and cast a mental glance over the whole business, trying to discover a weak point. Then in a voice that frankly revealed his admiration as an expert he said:

Arsène Lupin in Prison

'It's a good thing that there are not dozens like you, or there would be nothing for us but to shut up shop.'

Arsène Lupin assumed a modest simper and replied:

'Oh, I had to do something to amuse myself, to occupy my spare time . . . especially as the scoop could only succeed while I was in prison.'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Ganimard. 'Your trial, your defence, your examination: isn't that enough for you to amuse yourself with?'

'No, because I have decided not to attend my trial.'

'Oh, I say!'

Arsène Lupin repeated deliberately:

'I shall not attend my trial.'

'Really!'

'Why, my dear fellow, you surely don't think I mean to rot in gaol? The mere suggestion is an insult. Let me tell you that Arsène Lupin remains in prison as long as he thinks fit and not a moment longer.'

'It might have been more prudent to begin by not entering it,' said the inspector, ironically.

'Ah, so you're chaffing me, sirrah? Do you remember that you had the honour to effect my arrest? Well, learn from me, my respectable friend, that no one, neither you nor another, could have laid a hand upon me, if a much more important interest had not occupied my attention at that critical moment.'

'You surprise me.'

'A woman had cast her eyes upon me, Ganimard, and I loved her. Do you realise all that the fact implies when a woman whom one loves casts her eyes upon one? I cared about little else, I assure you. And that is why I'm here.'

'You've been here a long time, allow me to observe.'

'I was anxious to forget. Don't laugh, it was a charming adventure and I still have a tender recollection of it. . . . And then I have had a slight nervous break-down. We lead

such a feverish existence nowadays! It's a good thing to take a rest-cure from time to time. And there's no place for it like this. They carry out the cure in all its strictness at the Santé.'

'Arsène Lupin,' said Ganimard, 'you're pulling my leg.'

'Ganimard,' replied Lupin, 'this is Friday. On Wednesday next, I'll come and smoke a cigar with you, in the Rue Pergolese, at four o'clock in the afternoon.'

'Arsène Lupin, I shall expect you.'

They shook hands like two friends who have a proper sense of each other's value and the old detective turned towards the door.

'Ganimard!'

Ganimard looked round:

'What is it?'

'Ganimard, you've forgotten your watch.'

'My watch?'

'Yes, I've just found it in my pocket.'

He returned it, with apologies:

'Forgive me . . . it's a bad habit. . . . They've taken mine, but that's no reason why I should rob you of yours. Especially as I have a chronometer here which keeps perfect time and satisfies all my requirements.'

He took out of the drawer a large, thick, comfortable-looking gold watch, hanging to a heavy chain.

'And out of whose pocket does this come?' asked Ganimard.

Arsène Lupin carelessly inspected the initials:

'J.B. . . . What on earth does that stand for? . . . Oh, yes, I remember: Jules Bouvier, my examining magistrate, a charming fellow. . . .'

VIII

The Superfluous Finger

Jacques Futrelle

She drew off her left glove, a delicate, crinkled suede affair, and offered her bare hand to the surgeon. An artist would have called it beautiful, perfect, even; the surgeon, professionally enough, set it down as an excellent structural specimen. From the polished pink nails of the tapering fingers to the firm, well moulded wrist, it was distinctly the hand of a woman of ease—one that had never known labour, a pampered hand Dr Prescott told himself.

‘The fore-finger,’ she explained calmly. ‘I should like to have it amputated at the first joint, please.’

‘Amputated?’ gasped Dr Prescott. He stared into the pretty face of his caller. It was flushed softly, and the red lips were parted in a slight smile. It seemed quite an ordinary affair to her. The surgeon bent over the hand with quick interest. ‘Amputated!’ he repeated.

‘I came to you,’ she went on with a nod, ‘because I have been informed that you are one of the most skilful men of your profession, and the cost of the operation is quite immaterial.’

Dr Prescott pressed the pink nail of the fore-finger, then permitted the blood to rush back into it. Several times he

did this, then he turned the hand over and scrutinized it closely inside from the delicately lined palm to the tips of the fingers. When he looked up at last there was an expression of frank bewilderment on his face.

‘What’s the matter with it?’ he asked.

‘Nothing,’ the woman replied pleasantly. ‘I merely want it off from the first joint.’

The surgeon leaned back in his chair with a frown of perplexity on his brow, and his visitor was subjected to a sharp, professional stare. She bore it unflinchingly and even smiled a little at his obvious perturbation.

‘Why do you want it off?’ he demanded.

The woman shrugged her shoulders a little impatiently.

‘I can’t tell you that,’ she replied. ‘It really is not necessary that you should know. You are a surgeon, I want an operation performed. That is all.’

There was a long pause; the mutual stare didn’t waver.

‘You must understand, Miss—Miss—er—’ began Dr Prescott at last. ‘By the way, you have not introduced yourself?’ She was silent. ‘May I ask your name?’

‘My name is of no consequence,’ she replied calmly. ‘I might, of course, give you a name, but it would not be mine, therefore any name would be superfluous.’

Again the surgeon stared.

‘When do you want the operation performed?’ he inquired.

‘Now,’ she replied. ‘I am ready.’

‘You must understand,’ he said severely, ‘that surgery is a profession for the relief of human suffering, not for mutilation—wilful mutilation I might say.’

‘I understand that perfectly,’ she said. ‘But where a person submits of her own desire to—to mutilation as you call it, I can see no valid objection on your part.’

‘It would be criminal to remove a finger where there is no

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necessity for it,' continued the surgeon bluntly. 'No good end could be served.'

A trace of disappointment showed in the young woman's face, and again she shrugged her shoulders.

'The question after all,' she said finally, 'is not one of ethics but is simply whether or not you will perform the operation. Would you do it for, say, a thousand dollars?'

'Not for five thousand dollars,' blurted the surgeon.

'Well, for ten thousand then?' she asked, quite casually.

All sorts of questions were pounding in Dr Prescott's mind. Why did a young and beautiful woman desire—why was she anxious even—to sacrifice a perfectly healthy finger? What possible purpose would it serve to mar a hand which was as nearly perfect as any he had ever seen? Was it some insane caprice? Staring deeply into her steady, quiet eyes he could only be convinced of her sanity. Then what?

'No, madam,' he said at last, vehemently, 'I would not perform the operation for any sum you might mention, unless I was first convinced that the removal of that finger was absolutely necessary. That, I think, is all.'

He arose as if to end the consultation. The woman remained seated and continued thoughtful for a minute.

'As I understand it,' she said, 'you *would* perform the operation if I could convince you that it was absolutely necessary?'

'Certainly,' he replied promptly, almost eagerly. His curiosity was aroused. 'Then it would come within the range of my professional duties.'

'Won't you take my word that it is necessary, and that it is impossible for me to explain why?'

'No. I must know why.'

The woman arose and stood facing him. The disappointment had gone from her face now.

'Very well,' she remarked steadily. 'You *will* perform

the operation if it is necessary, therefore if I should shoot the finger off, perhaps—?’

‘Shoot if off?’ exclaimed Dr Prescott in amazement. ‘Shoot it off?’

‘That is what I said,’ she replied calmly. ‘If I should shoot the finger off you would consent to dress the wound? You would make any necessary amputation?’

She held up the finger under discussion and looked at it curiously. Dr Prescott himself stared at it with a sudden new interest.

‘Shoot it off?’ he repeated. ‘Why you must be mad to contemplate such a thing,’ he exploded, and his face flushed in sheer anger. ‘I—I will have nothing whatever to do with the affair, madam. Good day.’

‘I should have to be very careful of course,’ she mused, ‘but I think perhaps one shot would be sufficient, then I should come to you and demand that you dress it?’

There was a question in the tone. Dr Prescott stared at her for a full minute then walked over and opened the door.

‘In my profession, madam,’ he said coldly, ‘there is too much possibility of doing good and relieving actual suffering for me to consider this matter or discuss it further with you. There are three persons now waiting in the ante-room who *need* my services. I shall be compelled to ask you to excuse me.’

‘But you will dress the wound?’ the woman insisted, undaunted by his forbidding tone and manner.

‘I shall have nothing whatever to do with it,’ declared the surgeon, positively, finally. ‘If you need the services of any medical man permit me to suggest that it is an alienist and not a surgeon.’

The woman didn’t appear to take offence.

‘Someone would have to dress it,’ she continued insistently. ‘I should much prefer that it be a man of undisputed skill—you, I mean, therefore I shall call again. Good day.’

The Superfluous Finger

There was a rustle of silken skirts and she was gone. Dr Prescott stood for an instant gazing after her in frank wonder and annoyance in his eyes, his attitude, then he went back and sat down at the desk. The crinkled suede glove still lay where she had left it. He examined it gingerly then with a final shake of his head dismissed the affair and turned to other things.

Early next afternoon Dr Prescott was sitting in his office writing when the door from the ante-room where patients awaited his leisure was thrown open and the young man in attendance rushed in.

'A lady has fainted, sir,' he said hurriedly. 'She seems to be hurt.'

Dr Prescott arose quickly and strode out. There, lying helplessly back in her chair with white face and closed eyes, was his visitor of the day before. He stepped toward her quickly then hesitated as he recalled their conversation. Finally, however, professional instinct, the desire to relieve suffering, and perhaps curiosity too, caused him to go to her. The left hand was wrapped in an improvised bandage through which there was a trickle of blood. He glared at it with incredulous eyes.

'Hanged if she didn't do it,' he blurted out, angrily.

The fainting spell, Dr Prescott saw, was due only to loss of blood and physical pain, and he busied himself trying to restore her to consciousness. Meanwhile he gave some hurried instructions to the young man who was in attendance in the ante-room.

'Call up Professor Van Dusen on the 'phone,' he directed. 'and ask him if he can assist me in a minor operation. Tell him it's rather a curious case and I am sure it will interest him.'

It was in this manner that the problem of the superfluous finger first came to the attention of The Thinking Machine. He arrived just as the mysterious woman was opening her

eyes to consciousness from the fainting spell. She stared at him glassily, unrecognizingly; then her glance wandered to Dr Prescott. She smiled.

‘I knew you’d have to do it,’ she murmured weakly.

After the ether had been administered for the operation, a simple and an easy one, Dr Prescott stated the circumstances of the case to The Thinking Machine. The scientist stood with his long, slender fingers resting lightly on the young woman’s pulse, listening in silence.

‘What do you make of it?’ demanded the surgeon.

The Thinking Machine didn’t say. At the moment he was leaning over the unconscious woman squinting at her forehead. With his disengaged hand he stroked the delicately pencilled eye-brows several times the wrong way, and again at close range squinted at them. Dr Prescott saw and seeing, understood.

‘No, it isn’t that,’ he said and he shuddered a little. ‘I thought of it myself. Her bodily condition is excellent, splendid.’

It was some time later when the young woman was sleeping lightly, placidly under the influence of a soothing potion, that The Thinking Machine spoke of the peculiar events which had preceded the operation. Then he was sitting in Dr Prescott’s private office. He had picked up a woman’s glove from the desk.

‘This is the glove she left when she first called, isn’t it?’ he inquired.

‘Yes.’

‘Did you happen to see her remove it?’

‘Yes.’

The Thinking Machine curiously examined the dainty, perfumed trifle, then, arising suddenly, went into the adjoining room where the woman lay asleep. He stood for an instant gazing down admiringly at the exquisite, slender figure; then, bending over, he looked closely at her left

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hand. When at last he straightened up it seemed that some unspoken question in his mind had been answered. He rejoined Dr Prescott.

‘It’s difficult to say what motive is back of her desire to have the finger amputated,’ he said musingly. ‘I could perhaps venture a conjecture but if the matter is of no importance to you beyond mere curiosity I should not like to do so. Within a few months from now, I daresay, important developments will result and I should like to find out something more about her. That I can do when she returns to wherever she is stopping in the city. I’ll ’phone to Mr Hatch and have him ascertain for me where she goes, her name and other things which may throw a light on the matter.’

‘He will follow her?’

‘Yes, precisely. Now we only seem to know two facts in connection with her. First, she is English.’

‘Yes,’ Dr Prescott agreed. ‘Her accent, her appearance, everything about her suggests that.’

‘And the second fact is of no consequence at the moment,’ resumed The Thinking Machine. ‘Let me use your ’phone please.’

Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, was talking.

‘When the young woman left Dr Prescott’s she took the cab which had been ordered for her and told the driver to go ahead until she stopped him. I got a good look at her, by the way. I managed to pass just as she entered the cab and walking on down got into another cab which was waiting for me. Her cab drove for three or four blocks aimlessly, and finally stopped. The driver stooped down as if to listen to someone inside, and my cab passed. Then the other cab turned across a side street and after going eight or ten blocks pulled up in front of an apartment house. The young woman got out and went inside. Her cab went away. Inside I found out that she was Mrs Frederick Chevedon Morey.

She came there last Tuesday—this is Friday—with her husband, and they engaged—’

‘Yes, I knew she had a husband,’ interrupted The Thinking Machine.

‘—engaged apartments for three months. When I had learned this much I remembered your instructions as to steamers from Europe landing on the day they took apartments or possibly a day or so before. I was just going out when Mrs Morey stepped out of the elevator and preceded me to the door. She had changed her clothing and wore a different hat.

‘It didn’t seem to be necessary then to find out where she was going for I knew I could find her when I wanted to, so I went down and made inquiries at the steamship offices. I found, after a great deal of work, that no one of the three steamers which arrived the day they took apartments brought a Mr and Mrs Morey, but one steamer on the day before brought a Mr and Mrs David Girardeau from Liverpool. Mrs Girardeau answered Mrs Morey’s description to the minutest detail even to the gown she wore when she left the steamer—that is the same she wore when she left Dr Prescott’s after the operation.’

— That was all. The Thinking Machine sat with his enormous yellow head pillowed against a high-backed chair and his long slender fingers pressed tip to tip. He asked no questions and made no comment for a long time, then:

‘About how many minutes was it from the time she entered the house until she came out again?’

‘Not more than ten or fifteen,’ was the reply. ‘I was still talking casually to the people downstairs trying to find out something about them.’

‘What do they pay for their apartment?’ asked the scientist, irrelevantly.

‘Three hundred dollars a month.’

The Thinking Machine’s squint eyes were fixed immove-

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ably on a small discoloured spot on the ceiling of his laboratory.

'Whatever else may develop in this matter, Mr Hatch,' he said after a time, 'we must admit that we have met a woman with extraordinary courage—nerve, I daresay you'd call it. When Mrs Morey left Dr Prescott's operating room she was so ill and weak from the shock that she could hardly stand, and now you tell me she changed her dress and went out immediately after she returned home.'

'Well, of course—' Hatch said, apologetically.

'In that event,' resumed the scientist, 'we must assume also that the matter is one of the utmost importance to her, and yet the nature of the case had led me to believe that it might be months, perhaps, before there would be any particular development in it.'

'What? How?' asked the reporter.

'The final development doesn't seem, from what I know, to belong on this side of the ocean at all,' explained The Thinking Machine. 'I imagine it is a case for Scotland Yard. The problem of course is: What made it necessary for her to get rid of that finger? If we admit her sanity we can count the possible answers to this question on one hand, and at least three of these answers take the case back to England.' He paused. 'By the way, was Mrs Morey's hand bound up in the same way when you saw her the second time?'

'Her left hand was in a muff,' explained the reporter. 'I couldn't see but it seems to me that she wouldn't have had time to change the manner of its dressing.'

'It's extraordinary,' commented the scientist. He arose and paced back and forth across the room. 'Extraordinary,' he repeated. 'One can't help but admire the fortitude of women under certain circumstances, Mr Hatch. I think perhaps this particular case had better be called to the attention of Scotland Yard, but first I think it would be

best for you to call on the Moreys tomorrow—you can find some pretext—and see what you can learn about them. You are an ingenious young man—I'll leave it all to you.'

Hatch did call at the Morey apartments on the morrow but under circumstances which were not at all what he expected. He went there with Detective Mallory, and Detective Mallory went there in a cab at full speed because the manager of the apartment house had 'phoned that Mrs Frederick Chevedon Morey had been found murdered in her apartments. The detective ran up two flights of stairs and blundered, heavy-footed into the rooms, and there he paused in the presence of death.

The body of the woman lay on the floor and some one had mercifully covered it with a cloth from the bed. Detective Mallory drew the covering down from over the face and Hatch stared with a feeling of awe at the beautiful countenance which had, on the day before, been so radiant with life. Now it was distorted into an expression of awful agony and the limbs were drawn up convulsively. The mark of the murderer was at the white, exquisitely rounded throat—great black bruises, where powerful merciless fingers had sunk deeply into the soft flesh.

A physician in the house had preceded the police. After one glance at the woman and a swift, comprehensive look about the room, Detective Mallory turned to him inquiringly.

'She has been dead for several hours,' the doctor volunteered, 'possibly since early last night. It appears that some virulent, burning poison was administered and then she was choked. I gather this from an examination of her mouth.'

- These things were readily to be seen; also it was plainly evident for many reasons that the finger marks at the throat were those of a man, but each step beyond these obvious facts only served to further bewilder the investigators. First was the statement of the night elevator boy.

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'Mr and Mrs Morey left here last night about eleven o'clock,' he said. 'I know because I telephoned for a cab, and later brought them down from the third floor. They went into the manager's office leaving two suit cases in the hall. When they came out I took the suit cases to a cab that was waiting. They got in it and drove away.'

'When did they return?' inquired the detective.

'They didn't return, sir,' responded the boy. 'I was on duty until six o'clock this morning. It just happened that no one came in after they went out until I was off duty at six.'

The detective turned to the physician again.

'Then she couldn't have been dead since early last night,' he said.

'She has been dead for several hours—at least twelve, possibly longer,' said the physician firmly. 'There's no possible argument about that.'

The detective stared at him scornfully for an instant, then looked at the manager of the house.

'What was said when Mr and Mrs Morey entered your office last night?' he asked. 'Were you there?'

'I was there, yes,' was the reply. 'Mr Morey explained that they had been called away for a few days unexpectedly, and left the keys of the apartment with me. That was all that was said; I saw the elevator boy take the suitcases out for them as they went to the cab.'

'How did it come, then, if you knew they were away, that some one entered here this morning, and so found the body?'

'I discovered the body myself,' replied the manager. 'There was some electric wiring to be done in here and I thought their absence would be a good time for it. I came up to see about it and saw—that.'

He glanced at the covered body with a little shiver and a grimace. Detective Mallory was deeply thoughtful for several minutes.

'The woman is here and she's dead,' he said finally. 'If she is here she came back here, dead or alive last night between the time she went out with her husband and the time her body was found this morning. Now that's an absolute fact. But *how* did she come here?'

Of the three employees of the apartment house only the elevator boy on duty had not spoken. Now he spoke because the detective glared at him fiercely.

'I didn't see either Mr or Mrs Morey come in this morning,' he explained hastily. 'Nobody had come in at all except the postman and some delivery wagon drivers up to the time the body was found.'

Again Detective Mallory turned on the manager.

'Does any window of this apartment open on a fire escape?' he demanded.

'Yes—this way.'

They passed through the short hallway to the back. Both the windows were locked on the inside, so instantly it appeared that even if the woman had been brought into the room that way the windows would not have been fastened unless her murderer went out of the house the front way. When Detective Mallory reached this stage of the investigation he sat down and stared from one to the other of the silent little party as if he considered the entire matter some affair which they had perpetrated to annoy him.

Hutchinson Hatch started to say something, then thought better of it, and turning, went to the telephone below. Within a few minutes The Thinking Machine stepped out of a cab in front and paused in the lower hall long enough to listen to the facts developed. There was a perfect network of wrinkles in the dome-like brow when the reporter concluded.

'It's merely a transfer of the final development in the affair from England to this country,' he said enigmatically. 'Please 'phone for Dr Prescott to come here immediately.'

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He went on to the Morey apartments. With only a curt nod for Detective Mallory, the only one of the small party who knew him, he proceeded to the body of the dead woman and squinted down without a trace of emotion into the white, pallid face. After a moment he dropped on his knees beside the inert body and examined the mouth and the finger marks about the white throat.

'Carbolic acid and strangulation,' he remarked tersely to Detective Mallory who was leaning over watching him with something of hopeful eagerness in his stolid face. The Thinking Machine glanced past him to the manager of the house. 'Mr Morey is a powerful, athletic man in appearance?' he asked.

'Oh, no,' was the reply. 'He's short and slight, only a little larger than you are.'

The scientist squinted aggressively at the manager as if the description were not quite what he expected. Then the slightly puzzled expression passed.

'Oh, I see,' he remarked. 'Played the piano.' This was not a question; it was a statement.

'Yes, a great deal,' was the reply, 'so much so in fact that twice we had complaints from other persons in the house despite the fact that they had been here only a few days.'

'Of course,' mused the scientist abstractedly. 'Of course. Perhaps Mrs Morey did not play at all?'

'I believe she told me she did not.'

The Thinking Machine drew down the thin cloth which had been thrown over the body and glanced at the left hand.

'Dear me! Dear me!' he exclaimed suddenly, and he arose. 'Dear me!' he repeated. 'That's the—' He turned to the manager and the two elevator boys. 'This is Mrs Morey beyond any question?'

The answer was a chorus of affirmation accompanied by some startling facial expressions.

‘Did Mr and Mrs Morey employ any servants?’

‘No,’ was the reply. ‘They had their meals in the café below most of the time. There is no housekeeping in these apartments at all.’

‘How many persons live in the building?’

‘A hundred I should say.’

‘There is a great deal of passing to and fro, then?’

‘Certainly. It was rather unusual that so few persons passed in and out last night and this morning, and certainly Mrs Morey and her husband were not among them if that’s what you’re trying to find out.’

The Thinking Machine glanced at the physician who was standing by silently.

‘How long do you make it that she’s been dead?’ he asked.

‘At least twelve hours,’ replied the physician. ‘Possibly longer.’

‘Yes, nearer fourteen, I imagine.’

Abruptly he left the group and walked through the apartment and back again slowly. As he re-entered the room where the body lay, the door from the hall opened and Dr Prescott entered, followed by Hutchinson Hatch. The Thinking Machine led the surgeon straight to the body and drew the cloth back down from the face. Dr Prescott started back with an exclamation of astonishment, recognition.

‘There’s no doubt about it at all in your mind?’ inquired the scientist.

‘Not the slightest,’ replied Dr Prescott positively. ‘It’s the same woman.’

‘Yet look here!’

With a quick movement The Thinking Machine drew down the cloth still more. Dr Prescott, together with those who had no idea of what to expect, peered down at the body. After one glance the surgeon dropped on his knees and examined closely the dead left hand. The fore-finger was off at

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the first joint. Dr Prescott stared, stared incredulously. After a moment his eyes left the maimed hand and settled again on her face.

'I have never seen—never dreamed—of such a startling—' he began.

'That settles it all, of course,' interrupted The Thinking Machine. 'It solves and proves the problem at once. Now, Mr Mallory, if we can go to your office or some place where we will be undisturbed I will—'

'But who killed her?' demanded the detective abruptly. 'I have the photograph of her murderer in my pocket,' returned The Thinking Machine. 'Also a photograph of an accomplice.'

* * *

Detective Mallory, Dr Prescott, The Thinking Machine, Hutchinson Hatch, and the apartment house physician were seated in the front room of the Morey apartments with all doors closed against prying, inquisitive eyes. At the scientist's request Dr Prescott repeated the circumstances leading up to the removal of a woman's left fore-finger, and there The Thinking Machine took up the story.

'Suppose, Mr Mallory,' and the scientist turned to the detective, 'a woman should walk into *your* office and say she must have a finger cut off, what would you think?'

'I'd think she was crazy,' was the prompt reply.

'Naturally, in your position,' The Thinking Machine went on, 'you are acquainted with many strange happenings. Wouldn't this one instantly suggest something to you? Something that was to happen months off?'

Detective Mallory considered it wisely, but was silent.

'Well,' declared The Thinking Machine. 'A woman whom we now know to be Mrs Morey wanted her finger cut off. It instantly suggested three, four, five, a dozen possibili-

ties. Of course only one, or possibly two in combination, could be true. Therefore which one? A little logic now to prove that two and two always make four—not *some* times but *all* the time.

‘Naturally the first supposition was insanity. We pass that as absurd on its faces. Then disease—a taint of leprosy perhaps which had been visible on the left fore-finger. I tested for that, and that was eliminated. Three strong reasons for desiring the finger off, either of which is strongly probable, remained. The fact that the woman was English unmistakably was obvious. From the mark of a wedding ring on her glove and a corresponding mark on her finger—she wore no such ring—we could safely surmise that she was married. These were the two first facts I learned. Substantive evidence that she was married and not a widow came partly from her extreme youth and the lack of mourning in her attire.

‘Then Mr Hatch followed her, learned her name, where she lived, and later the fact that she had arrived with her husband on a steamer a day or so before they took apartments here. This was proof that she was English, and proof that she had a husband. They came over on the steamer as Mr and Mrs David Girardeau—here they were Mr and Mrs Frederick Chevedon Morey. Why this difference in name? The circumstance in itself pointed to irregularity—crime committed or contemplated. Other things made me think it was merely contemplated and that it could be prevented; for then absence of every fact gave me no intimation that there would be murder. Then came the murder presumably of—Mrs Morey?’

‘Isn’t it Mrs Morey?’ demanded the detective.

‘Mr Hatch recognized the woman as the one he had followed, I recognized her as the one on which there had been an operation. Dr Prescott also recognized her,’ continued the Thinking Machine. ‘To convince myself, after

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I had found the manner of death, that it was the woman, I looked at her left hand. I found that the fore-finger was gone—it had been removed by a skilled surgeon at the first joint. And this fact instantly showed me that the dead woman was not Mrs Morey at all, but somebody else; and incidentally cleared up the entire affair.'

'How?' demanded the detective. 'I thought you just said that you had helped cut off her fore-finger?'

'Dr Prescott and I cut off that finger yesterday,' replied The Thinking Machine calmly. 'The finger of the dead woman had been cut off months, perhaps years, ago.'

There was blank amazement on Detective Mallory's face, and Hatch was staring straight into the squint eyes of the scientist. Vaguely, as through a mist, he was beginning to account for many things which had been hitherto inexplicable.

'The perfectly healed wound on the hand eliminated every possibility but one,' The Thinking Machine resumed. 'Previously I had been informed that Mrs Morey did not—or said she did not—play the piano. I had seen the bare possibility of an immense insurance on her hands, and some trick to defraud the insurance company by marrying one. Of course against this was the fact that she had offered to pay a large sum for the operation; that their expenses here must have been enormous, so I was beginning to doubt the tenability of this supposition. The fact that the dead woman's finger was off removed that possibility completely, as it also removed the possibility of a crime of some sort in which there might have been left behind a tell-tale print of that fore-finger. If there had been a serious crime with the trace of the finger as evidence, its removal would have been necessary to her.'

'Then the one thing remained—that is that Mrs Morey or whatever her name is—was in a conspiracy with her husband to get possession of certain properties, perhaps a

title—remember she is English—by sacrificing that finger so that identification might be in accordance with the description of an heir whom she was to impersonate. We may well believe that she was provided with the necessary documentary evidence, and we know conclusively—we don't conjecture but we *know*—that the dead woman in there is the woman whose rights were to have been stolen by the so-called Mrs Morey.'

'But that is Mrs Morey, isn't it?' demanded the detective again.

'No,' was the sharp retort. 'The perfect resemblance to Mrs Morey and the finger removed long ago makes that clear. There is, I imagine, a relationship between them—perhaps they are cousins. I can hardly believe they are twins because the necessity, then, of one impersonating the other to obtain either money or a title, would not have existed so palpably although it is possible that Mrs Morey, if disinherited or disowned, would have resorted to such a course. This dead woman is Miss—Miss—' and he glanced at the back of a photograph, 'Miss Evelyn Rossmore, and she has evidently been living in this city for some time. This is her picture, and it was made at least a year ago by Hutchinson here. Perhaps he can give you her address as well.'

There was silence for several minutes. Each member of the little group was turning over the stated facts mentally, and Detective Mallory was staring at the photograph, studying the handwriting on the back.

'But how did she come here—like this?' Hatch inquired.

'You remember, Mr Hatch, when you followed Mrs Morey here you told me she dressed again and went out?' asked the scientist in turn. 'It was not Mrs Morey you saw then—she was ill and I knew it from the operation—it was Miss Rossmore. The manager says a hundred persons live in

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'Then the one thing remained—that is that Mrs Morey or whatever her name is—was in a conspiracy with her husband to get possession of certain properties, perhaps a

Jacques Futrelle

a steamer which sailed at half-past four o'clock. Their trial was a famous one and resulted in conviction after an astonishing story of an attempt to seize an estate and title longed rightfully to Miss Evelyn Rossmore who had mysteriously disappeared years before.

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this house—that there is a great deal of passing in and out. Can't you see that when there is such a startling resemblance Miss Rossmore could pass in and out at will and always be mistaken for Mrs Morey? That no one would ever notice the difference?'

'But who killed her?' asked Detective Mallory, curiously. 'How? Why?'

'Morey killed her,' said The Thinking Machine flatly, and he produced two other photographs from his pocket. 'There's his picture and his wife's picture for identification purposes. How did he kill her? We can fairly presume that first he tricked her into drinking the acid, then perhaps she was screaming with the pain of it, and he choked her to death. I imagined first he was a large, powerful man because his grip on her throat was so powerful that he ruptured the jugular inside; but instead of that he plays the piano a great deal, which would give him the hand-power to choke her. And why? We can suppose only that it was because she had in some way learned of their purpose. That would have established the motive. The crowning delicacy of the affair was Morey's act in leaving his keys with the manager here. He did not anticipate that the apartments would be entered for several days—after they were safely away—while there was a chance that if neither of them had been seen here and their disappearance was unexplained the rooms would have been opened to ascertain why. That is all, I think.'

'Except to catch Morey and his wife,' said the detective grimly.

'Easily done with those photographs,' said The Thinking Machine. 'I imagine, if this murder is kept out of the newspapers for a couple of hours you can find them about to sail for Europe. Suppose you try the line they came over on?'

It was just three hours later that the accused man and wife were taken prisoner. They had just engaged passage on

IX

A Sensible Course of Action

Palle Rosenkrantz

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH BY

MICHAEL MEYER.

She was very pretty; indeed, she was beautiful. Tall at most, slim, very smart in a foreign style; unpretentious, but the real thing. She turned to Holst as he entered, and her grey dress rustled with the light whisper of silk. It sat as though moulded to her fine body, almost as though cast and not yet set. Her cheeks flushed, a little too redly, and her eyes flickered nervously.

Holst bowed to the Inspector. His eyes rested on her for no more than a second; but he saw much in a glance.

The Inspector asked him to sit. He sounded somewhat embarrassed. He sat at his desk facing the lady, restless as always, toying with a paper-knife, which he put down to scratch his sparse reddish hair.

Holst seated himself and looked at the lady.

'Lieutenant Holst, my assistant,' explained the Inspector in French. Holst bowed slightly.

The Inspector broke into Danish. He was not very fluent in French.

‘A ridiculous business, Holst,’ he said. ‘I’m damned if I know what course of action we should take. This lady says her name is Countess Wolkonski, and that she is from Russia. Her papers are in order.’

He tapped the desk with some documents which had been lying in front of him.

‘Countess Wolkonski from Volhynien, to be precise from Shitomir in the district of Kiev. She is a widow. Her husband died in a Russian prison. He was a naval officer who was implicated in the Odessa mutiny—she says. Her only son died too, not long after his father—she says. She is passing through Copenhagen and is staying at the Hotel Phoenix. She arrived the day before yesterday. But, and this is the point, she asserts that her husband’s brother, who is also named Count Wolkonski, is trailing her and intends to murder her, because he believes she betrayed her husband to the Russian authorities. She went into a long rigmarole about it, all straight out of a novelette. To cut a long story short, she wants me to protect her. A charming person, as you can see, but I’m damned if I know what to do about her.’

‘I am handing this case over to Mr Holst,’ he added in French to the lady.

She inclined her head and looked at Holst, as though seeking his help. Her eyes were at the same time searching and pleading. She was very beautiful.

‘I have checked,’ continued the Inspector, ‘that there is a Count Wolkonski staying at the Phoenix. He arrived a few hours ago from Malmö, and asked to see the Countess. When the porter sent up to her she was out, but as soon as she returned and learned that the Count was there she came along here like a scalded cat. I’ve tried to explain to her that there’s really nothing I can do. She practically fell around my neck, which would have been delightful, but how can I possibly help her? We can’t arrest the man, for we’ve nothing against him, we can’t take her into custody,

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and she genuinely seems too terrified to go back to her. I've promised her I'll send a man down to the hotel. I must have a word with this Russian fellow and find out what it's all about. Of course we could send her papers to the Embassy, but I can't keep her here. You take her and do what you can. I know I can rely on you to take a sensible course of action.'

Holst said nothing, but rose and bowed.

'Please go with this gentleman,' explained the Frenchman, thinking how much more charming the words were in French: 'voulez-vous aller avec ce monsieur?'

The lady protested. She would not go.

'Madame,' said Holst. 'You need have no fear. No harm can befall you if you come with me.' He looked impressively heroic as he said it. He was much better-looking than the Inspector, and spoke much better French. His appearance radiated reliability. He was a handsome man.

She accepted his hand a little timidly and looked at him with two deep black eyes in a way that would have bothered Holst's wife Ulla if she could have seen it. He noticed a small movement at the corners of her mouth, a faint tremor of emotion. She looked very unhappy.

The Inspector seemed impatient.

Eventually the lady agreed to go with Holst; and as they walked through the offices, all the station clerks almost audibly craned their necks.

The Inspector muttered something to himself and, uncharacteristically, bit one of his nails.

* * *

Holst drove with the lady towards Vimmelskaftet. As she realized where they were going, she became very nervous.

'Monsieur Olst,' she said. 'You must not take me to t

hotel. He will kill me. He has sworn to kill me, and he will do it, at whatever cost. I am innocent, but he is a traitor, a very great traitor. He has killed my little Ivan—do you hear, they murdered my little Ivan!’ She was totally distraught, and began a long story which lasted until they reached the corner of Pilestraede. It was a strange story, involving Dimitri Ivanovitch and Nicolai and the police and an Admiral Skrydlov and a Lieutenant Schmidt and others besides.

But she would not return to the Hotel Phoenix, and at the corner of Ny Ølstergade she tried to get out of the cab. Is she mad, wondered Holst. But she looked, no, sensible. Hysterical, yes, afraid certainly; thus Dimitri Ivanovitch wanted to shoot her, of that she was sure.

Holst did not get many words in. He leaned out of the cab and told the man to drive down St. Kongensgade to Marmorpladsen. At least that would provide a temporary respite. Then he explained to her what he had in mind, and that calmed her somewhat. She continued her narrative about Odessa, Lieutenant Schmidt and several Admirals.

Her voice was deep and rich. When she was calm, her face revealed a certain strength. But she was plainly very frightened, and it seemed unlikely to Holst that these fears could be wholly without foundation. Unless of course, she was mad.

The cab stopped at Holst’s house, and he led the lady up the stairs and rang the bell. His wife was at home. It was lunchtime, and he introduced the Russian lady with a brief explanation of her presence. ‘Either she is mad,’ he said, ‘in which case I must get a doctor to her, or she is in genuine trouble, in which case we must try to help her. Talk French to her and see if you can make anything of her. I’ll be back in half an hour.’

So Ulla Holst found herself alone with the lady. It was the first time her husband had asked her to do anything like

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this. However, it seemed to her that if one member of the family had to have a tête-à-tête with so extraordinarily beautiful a woman, it was just as well that it should be she.

The lady accepted a cup of coffee, sat down, and began to talk in a more ordered and logical manner. Gradually but visibly, she regained her self-composure. Ulla Holst sat and listened, blonde and calm, and found the Russian lady's story by no means incredible. As she listened to its ramifications, Holst drove to the Hotel Phoenix and asked to see Count Dimitri Ivanovitch Wolkonski.

He was in his room, and the porter took Holst up.

The Count was a tall man, of military appearance, rather short-sighted, very swarthy, and far from attractive. A real Tartar, thought Holst. But he was courteous, and spoke exquisite French.

'Count Wolkonski?' asked Holst. The man nodded.

'I am from the city police,' continued Holst. 'A lady residing in this hotel has come to us and asked for protection against you, on the grounds that you have designs upon her life.'

Holst smiled politely and shrugged his shoulders. 'The lady was in a very excited frame of mind—'

'Where is she?' interrupted the Russian, looking sharply at Holst.

Holst didn't like his eyes.

'She struck us as mentally confused,' replied Holst. 'So we are keeping her under observation. Her story was so involved and improbable that we felt unable to regard it as anything but a—hallucination.'

The Russian said nothing.

Holst went on: 'I should appreciate it if you could tell me the truth of the matter. We naturally thought of approaching your Embassy—'

'There is no need for that,' interrupted the Russian quickly. 'No need whatever. My sister-in-law—'

tally ill—certainly not insane. But my brother's unhappy fate upset her balance. Then her only child died. In my house, unfortunately, and she is convinced that I was to blame. That is the situation—as you have seen. I followed her here. She sold her estates in Russia; she had a fortune—she is very wealthy and spoiled. I traced her in Stockholm. She has made insane dispositions of her property, involving considerable sums that concern me. *Enfin*. I must speak to her, to try to bring her to her senses. Where is she?’

Holst looked closely at the Russian. He thought the fellow was talking jerkily and a little hectically. But he might be telling the truth, and the lady's behaviour had certainly been curious.

‘If you could accompany me to the Embassy it is possible that by discussing the matter with His Excellency and the Embassy doctor we might be able to arrange matters to your satisfaction. We cannot possibly take any action in this affair except through the authorities.’

The Russian nibbled his lip.

‘You realize, officer, that our position in Russia is not easy. My brother was deeply compromised in a naval mutiny. He died in prison. I myself—God knows, I have been guilty of no crime, but I neither can nor will deal with the representative in your country of a ruler whom I regard as a tyrant. I hope you understand. Yours is a free country. Such political differences of opinion as may exist between the Tsarist régime and myself are no concern of yours, as I think you will agree. But I do not wish to have any intercourse with the Ambassador, or anything whatever to do with our Embassy.’

Holst reflected.

‘It is unfortunate,’ he said. ‘But I appreciate your point of view. I have no official cause to take action against you. We do not perform political errands for foreign governments. I have received no orders in this affair and have no

desire to take any step on my own initiative. Your sister-in-law asserts that you have designs on her life, but we cannot act on so vague a charge. But I must warn you that we shall be compelled to contact the Embassy, and it is possible that their reaction may alter the position.'

'Will you arrest me?' asked the Russian sharply.

'Certainly not,' replied Holst. 'I have not the slightest ground or justification for that. But if you feel that any unpleasantness may result for you, my advice is that you should leave immediately. We shall have to speak to the Embassy and—well, I don't know, but it is always possible that—. By leaving you will avoid any disagreeable consequences.'

'I shall not leave without my sister-in-law,' replied the Count.

Holst was silent.

'Where is she?'

'At the police station,' said Holst. 'If you care to go there, you can see her there.'

'And meanwhile you will contact the Embassy?'

'My superior has probably already done so,' replied Holst. The Russian's face pleased him less and less.

'Very well. Then I shall come at once with you to the police station. When my sister-in-law has seen me and spoken with me, I hope she may come to her senses, unless—'

He shrugged his shoulders.

Holst felt unhappy. Now the Inspector would have another Russian on his hands. But what could be done? If this sinister character was really at odds with the Tsar, his position was hardly of the kind that could justify any action against him in Denmark. The newspapers had their eyes open, and the government would hardly be anxious to stretch itself to assist the present Russian régime. The main danger was for the Countess, if her brother-in-law really—but that was unthinkable. He scarcely suggested a mad

Nihilist with a revolver in his pocket; indeed, she seemed rather the less balanced of the two. Besides, he was under the eye of the police, and if the worst came to the worst Holst could help her to get out of the country while the Count discussed the matter with the Chief of Police, who would have to be brought in where such international issues were involved. Then the two could work out their problems in Malmo or Berlin, which were not in Holst's district.

To gain time, however, he prepared a long report giving the Count's explanation of why he was trailing his sister-in-law. It read very plausibly. She had fled after somewhat precipitately disposing of her estates, to which he apparently had some legal claim; she was in a highly nervous and distraught state. His political opinions made it impossible for him to seek the assistance of the Russian Embassy; he therefore appealed to the police for assistance and, if necessary, medical aid, and undertook to present himself before the Chief of Police that day.

Holst pocketed this paper and returned to his apartment.

* * *

Ulla Holst had become quite friendly with the Countess. She had a kind heart, and the Countess's story was of the kind to bring two sensitive ladies close together. Countess Helena Wolkonski was the daughter of a Lithuanian landowner; at an early age she had married a naval officer, Count Nicolai Wolkonski, with whom she had spent six happy years. Then her husband, who was attached to the marine depot at Odessa, had become addicted to drink and cards. Marital infidelity had followed, and their home had broken up. The Count had allied himself to the forces of political discontent, thereby threatening the safety of his wife and child. In her despair the young wife had gone to his commanding officer and—she did not deny it—had betrayed

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him and his brother, who were hostile to the existing régime and were deeply implicated in the revolutionary movement. Count Wolkonski, by now in a state of physical degeneration, had been arrested and shortly afterwards had died in prison. His brother had saved himself by flight, taking with him her son, a boy of seven. Before long he had written to her demanding that she visit him in Vienna, whither he had betaken himself. She had no other relatives to turn to, and had therefore sold her estates. These realized a considerable sum. In Vienna she learned that her son was dead and—she declared—an old woman who had accompanied her brother-in-law on his flight had warned her that he was planning revenge. She said he had sworn to kill her to repay her for her treachery.

Such was her story.

She had fled, and he had followed her. She dared not return to Russia, for fear of the revolutionaries, so had gone to Stockholm, where he had traced her. Now she was fleeing southwards.

Ulla Holst believed her story, and Holst had no evidence to contradict it. He briefly summarized his meeting with the Count and advised the Countess to leave the country with all speed, since she could produce no evidence for her charges against her brother-in-law. Her son's death had been caused by pneumonia, and although it was not impossible that the Count was responsible there could be no means of proving this, or of taking any action against him.

Ulla deplored the masculine indifference of the police, but Holst had to explain that there was nothing they could do in this case.

'And if he murders her?' she asked.

'Well, then we must arrest him,' said Holst.

'But let us hope he won't.'

'And you call that police work?'

Holst shrugged his shoulders. 'We can't put people in custody for things they might do.'

Ulla could not understand that; but women do not understand everything, least of all matters relating to the police. Countess Wolkonski despaired; however, her despair did not express itself in any violent outburst. Holst explained to her that the police could not take her into custody, since she had not committed any unlawful act, nor could they act against her brother-in-law, for the same reason. But he was willing to help her to leave the country.

'To be hunted to death like a wild beast?' was all she replied.

She calmed down, however. It was almost as though she had conceived some plan. She thanked Ulla warmly for all her kindness, kissed Holst's son, and wept as she patted his curls. Holst got her a cab. She refused his offer to accompany her, and drove away.

Ulla was very angry, and Holst not altogether at ease. He hurried back to the police station to keep an eye on the Russian.

* * *

At three o'clock the police station in Antoniestraede received a report that an elegantly dressed foreign lady had been arrested in a jeweller's shop on Købmagergade while attempting to steal a diamond ring. Holst was in his office: the Russian had not yet arrived. Holst had told him that the Chief of Police was unlikely to be available before three-thirty, since there was a parade at three.

A police van arrived, and Holst stood at the window as it rolled into the gloomy yard. A plain-clothes policeman stepped out, followed by a lady in grey.

It was Countess Wolkonski, arrested for attempted theft. Holst was slowly beginning to believe her story.

When she was brought into the station he went to meet

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her. She greeted him with a melancholy smile. 'Now, you will have to take care of me,' she said.

Holst bowed.

As he did so, he noticed through the window the figure of the Russian standing in the gateway of the yard. At once, with a quick word to the astonished desk sergeant, he ordered the Countess to be taken to the Inspector's office.

A few moments later Count Wolkonski entered and asked in German for the Chief of Police.

He was asked to take a seat.

Holst withdrew into his office to formulate a plan. If Countess Wolkonski had resorted to so desperate a measure as shoplifting to get taken into custody, her fears could not lightly be dismissed. In any case, it would be unpardonable under the circumstances to leave her to her own devices. There was no knowing what she might not do next. Besides, now she was under arrest she could be placed under observation; the magistrate would certainly order this, and in the meantime one might, through official channels, obtain at any rate some information which might throw light on this complicated affair. And the Count was sitting outside. He would certainly demand to be allowed to see her.

A cold shiver ran down Holst's spine. It was a momentary thought, a stupid, crazy, insane notion, but if—if that Russian was a fanatical revolutionary, an avenger—God knows, the whole business might have come out of a Russian novel, but in Russia, as one knew from the newspapers, anything was possible. Certainly a Copenhagen police officer had no right to believe all that is in the newspapers; he has no right to believe that novels can come to life; he must act soberly and professionally. But—Russia is, when all is said and done, Russia, and it cannot all be lies. Suppose that Count Wolkonski before the very eyes of the Chief of Police were to draw a pistol from his pocket and shoot his sister-in-law, or—suppose he took out a bomb, a bomb, that might

blow the whole police station with its lord and master into the air?

Of course it was totally impossible, idiotic, crazy, insane. This was Copenhagen, A.D. 1905. But the notion had got inside Holst's head, and was beating away with impish hammers in a way to drive any man from his wits.

He could not possibly say all this to anyone. The Inspector would think he had lost his reason. And so he had; it was an obsession, a foolish obsession from which he could not free himself. In ten minutes the parade would be over, and the case would be on the carpet. The Countess, now a shoplifter caught red-handed, would be confronted with the Count. A flash, an explosion, and the Chief of Police himself might be flying skywards.

Then Lieutenant Engil Holst, of the Copenhagen police force, on his own responsibility, and at his own risk took a decision which branded him not as a sober, reliable and trained officer but as a man of dangerous fantasy.

He summoned one of the youngest and most slavishly obedient of the station's constables, went to the window where Count Wolkonski was seated correctly on a bench, formally charged him with being implicated in an attempted robbery committed at a shop in Købmagergade by a woman calling herself his sister-in-law, had the amazed Count marched into an adjacent room, had him, despite some considerable resistance, searched, and found in his right trouser pocket a small American revolver containing six sharp bullets.

Holst drafted a stylish report to his Chief of Police, with the result that the sun set that evening over a cell at Nytorv in which Count Dimitri Ivanovitch Wolkonski sat sadly with sunken head, following a highly suspicious interrogation. And, it must be added, when the sun rose over the same cell, Count Dimitri Ivanovitch Wolkonski was found hanging by his braces dead on a gas bracket.

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It is well known that it is easier to enter the clutches of the law than escape from them. Countess Wolkonski had found great difficulty in persuading the police to put her under their protection. She had resorted to a radical method. She had succeeded; but she remained in custody. The Chief of Police dared not set her at liberty. Her theft had been barefaced and her explanation, however truthful it might seem, buttressed by Holst's evidence and a quantity of bonds and jewels in her possession valued at a considerable fortune, at the least required a closer investigation.

She was arrested, to Holst's distress, and Ulla Holst was less than respectful in her comments upon her husband's superior. The Countess spent the night in a cell, not far from the place where her enemy had met his death. The next day she was freed, Count Wolkonski's suicide having weighed powerfully in her favour.

Not everything that was written in the newspapers about this affair was untrue, but the full facts of what happened have not previously been revealed. The Embassy bestirred itself and obtained further details concerning the background of the case. Countess Wolkonski had in fact betrayed her husband. She was not a heroine, and could never be one.

But she was certainly beautiful, and now she had found peace of mind. Count Dimitri Wolkonski was a revolutionary, and as such was entitled to his due share of sympathy from all good and peace-loving Danish citizens who cannot bear to think of a butcher slaughtering a calf but support with all their hearts the bomb-throwing barricade heroes of darkest Russia. In truth, this Dimitri Wolkonski was one of the blackest villains upon whom the sun of Russia has ever shone. His conscience was so heavy with evil deeds that it is a wonder that the gas bracket in the cell at Nytorv did not break beneath his weight.

This must serve as some excuse for the pretty Countess,

and may explain why her brother-in-law, once he found himself in the hands of justice, settled his account with his Maker, whether the bill was right or no.

Yet Holst had a lingering suspicion that the Countess's life had never in fact been in danger, nor that of the Chief of Police; and that the Count had been carrying the pistol only in case his own life was threatened by his enemies. And he shared the doubts later drily expressed by the coroner as to whether his arrest and search of the Count had been justified.

Countess Helena stayed for some time in Copenhagen and was a frequent visitor at Ulla Holst's. Ulla enjoyed her company, and refused to believe that she had behaved wrongly in any way regarding those revolutionaries. Ulla was, after all, a policeman's wife, and was therefore opposed to any movement whose activities threatened the lives of policemen anywhere. When the Countess finally left Denmark, accompanied by Ulla's best wishes, the latter expressed her opinion of the affair to her husband. 'It may well be, Eigil,' she said, 'that you had no right to search that Russian, and that as you say it was a stupid idea you got into your head that afternoon in the station. But if you want my opinion, I think you took a very sensible course of action.'

Anonymous Letters

Balduin Groller

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
CHRISTOPHER DILKE

For some time past Andreas Grumbach had been pestered by a spate of anonymous letters. Admittedly, this did not cause him much inconvenience. His enormous wealth, his social position and his industrial power make Grumbach into one of the great ones of the Earth. He owns a jute mill and presides over the A.B.B., one of the biggest Banks in Austria. He is also for the time being Chairman of the Industrialists' Club. So a few letters are hardly likely to intimidate him. A person who gets more than a hundred letters a day, and reads through them at breakneck speed, gradually finds his sensibilities getting blunted. So much so that the writers of the letters would be very much disillusioned to discover how little moral effect their compositions have. Grumbach does not retain any trace of the naïve enthusiasm which someone who only receives a letter once in a while feels at the sight of the postman. He soon got to know the look of the anonymous letters. They were always written on a particular kind of paper and were always in the same pointed handwriting. Nowadays he

invariably threw them into the waste-paper basket unopened. And that might well have been the end of the matter. There was, however, a complicating factor. Andreas Grumbach's wife was also subjected to a spate of these letters and she was far from encountering them with the same philosophic detachment as her husband. Normally she was an uncommonly attractive woman: on the small side and a little plumper than in former days, with blonde hair, grey eyes, a pert little snub nose and a charmingly childlike expression on her round face. But now she was unhappy, cried a lot, suffered from nerves and found it difficult to be with other people. Any amount of trying to talk her out of it had no effect. She remained deeply sunk in her depression and had ceased to find any real enjoyment in life.

Like her husband, Frau Grumbach was used to taking a leading part in society but she was more anxious about it than she had any reason to be. It would never have occurred to anyone to challenge her position, let alone try and undermine it, but she nevertheless had a deep feeling of insecurity. When Grumbach married her she had been the little-known actress Violet Moorlank and it was from this that the insecurity stemmed. Nobody had ever dared to attack her reputation, but she was still unable to get over the fear that society would refuse to accept her as she was. Such anxiety, it should be said again, was entirely superfluous. Her husband's prestige was so strong and indeed unassailable as to put her own position above all criticism. But the insecurity existed and could not easily be exorcised. Obviously it was immensely boosted by these anonymous letters with their insidious, malign and unspeakably nasty contents.

This was why Andreas Grumbach made up his mind to do everything possible to bring the whole affair to a head. He had at his disposal his friend Dagobert Trostler, an

Anonymous Letters

experienced man of the world, extremely well-off, whose joy it was to spend his hours of leisure acting as an amateur detective. In a number of difficult and delicate cases this man's ingenuity and chess-player's skill had sometimes rendered important services. Surely, in the present situation, he would be able to give good advice at least.

Dagobert was a frequent visitor at the house and, the next time they were sitting together over a meal, Andreas Grumbach told him about the anonymous letters which he had been getting.

Immediately Dagobert turned towards the lady of the house and said: 'So that's what it's all about! You know, Frau Violet, I'm really upset with you. There you were with your secret sorrow and you kept it hidden away from me. Not the merest whisper was I allowed to hear. I really don't think that's a proper way to behave.'

'Who's talking about me?'

'We're all talking about you. Your husband is a man, and a man knows how to deal with any amount of men's nonsense. But I must say I'd find it hard to understand the psychology of an anonymous letter-writer who just tormented the husband, when he had such a marvellous opportunity of extending his attentions to the wife. Torturing the wife is not only the safer, but much more rewarding.'

'Dagobert,' said Frau Violet, 'it's impossible to hide anything from you. All right, I admit that I've been victimized by these dreadful letters and they're quite capable of driving me to distraction.'

'After what your husband told me, it wasn't difficult to account for your state of mind. It's long been obvious to me that you were unhappy, but as you chose to say nothing it wouldn't have been right for me to ask awkward questions. Would you like to show me the letters?'

'Not for anything in the world!'

'I understand They're too obscene. But it's really necessary to study the letters, if we're going to try and find the man—or the woman—who wrote them.'

'The woman? Is any woman capable of writing letters like that?'

'We must try and avoid being prejudiced. You know my views, Frau Violet. In everything which is good and great I put woman higher than man. In everything which is evil or malicious I put woman lower. In any case, please let me have all the letters which you have in your possession. Your husband has thrown his away. That was very hasty of him and it's a great pity. The more material I have, the more likely I am to discover a clue.'

Frau Violet brought him a whole pile of letters, some sixty or eighty in number.

'But you mustn't read them in my presence,' she told him, 'or I'd be so ashamed that I'd sink into the ground.'

Dagobert set her mind at rest: 'I'll wait and study them at home. Here and now, let's just look at their outward appearance. For one thing they're all exactly the same. The paper is mignonette green and evidently intended to look elegant, but it's still a cheap and unconvincing imitation of the solid Dutch hand-made paper, unfortunately.'

'Why do you say "unfortunately", Dagobert?'

'Well, because in the depths of my soul I was hoping for something better. You see, I once had another case of anonymous letters, but that was easy to solve. This one gives every sign of being far more difficult.'

'What sort of a case did you have, Dagobert?' the lady asked. 'I insist on your telling me.'

'With pleasure, dear lady, but just for the moment I'd rather stick to the subject in hand. Everything indicates that the writer of these present letters goes about his or her task with the greatest circumspection. For instance, the handwriting does not reveal any sign of the person's sex.'

Anonymous Letter

I'm entitled to say that with some certainty, because I've studied graphology as closely as it's possible to study it.

Dagobert looked at the addresses through his pocket magnifying-glass and then gave himself up to a few seconds of intensive thought. At the same time he twisted the tuft of hair on his forehead until it stuck up in the air and gave him the look of a clown in a circus.

'There's such a mixture of male and female characteristics,' he said reflectively, 'that it's enough to drive one crazy. Either it's a very mannish woman or it's an effeminate man. Isn't there anybody whom you suspect, Frau Violet?'

'I haven't the faintest idea.'

'There's nothing to be hoped for from graphology. It's bound to fail in cases where the handwriting is disguised, and here it's been disguised most methodically. We can only assume that the writer's normal handwriting is a sloping one. That's all. This pointed, upright style has of course completely altered its nature. It's very doubtful whether the letters will produce enough evidence to enable me to reconstruct the original character.'

'So you don't think there's a chance of discovering the criminal?'

'I find the case interesting and I'm prepared to go to a lot of trouble. The first thing is to study the letters really carefully. I may be able to find some clues in the content, the literary style, particular phrases and the spelling and punctuation. It's impossible to promise anything in advance. You can tell from the postmarks how methodically everything has been planned. Look! Almost every letter has a different stamp. This one comes from post-office 66, this one from 125, and these from 13, 47, 59. . . . They were obviously posted in the course of circuitous walks or carriage-rides. So it's no good setting a watch on any particular post-office or post-box.'

‘Does that mean we really have no hope?’

‘I told you I was prepared to take trouble, so I do have hope.’

‘You sound quite confident, I must say.’

‘Well, one has to believe in oneself.’

‘You said you’d once known another case, Dagobert. What was that?’ asked Frau Violet, who felt an understandable curiosity to know all the details.

‘As I mentioned, it was a very simple matter,’ Dagobert told her, ‘but it still gave me a good deal of pleasure. One day the Archduke Othmar’s Adjutant called on me and summoned me to the Palace. I went with him immediately and the Archduke, in a private audience, was kind enough to say that he had been specially interested in my achievements as an amateur detective. He told me he had a proposition, or rather a request, to make of me. Of course I at once signified my readiness. I said in fact that His Imperial Highness had only to command and I would obey.’

‘The case was similar to the present one. Anonymous letters had been sent not only to him as the head of the household but to his lady wife. The Archduke told me that he attached great importance to discovering the writer’s identity, but that he was disinclined to call in the police. On the basis of what he had heard, he had more confidence in my own ability to solve the case.’

‘Very well. I asked for the letters to be handed over. To my amazement there were hundreds of them. I took them away with me.’

Frau Violet, in her excitement, asked: ‘Were they as vulgar and horrible as mine?’

‘Oh, my dear lady, whatever has been written to you could not possibly equal, let alone surpass, the filth and obscenity in that pile of letters.’

‘And did you solve the mystery?’

Anonymous Letters

'I was lucky. The case was over and done with hours.'

'Tell me the story, Dagobert.'

'When I received the letters, my first question to Their Highnesses was whether they had any suspicion or clue about the writer. The answer was in the negative. So I took the letters home, read them through carefully, and then gave myself up to silent meditation for more than two hours. However, I wasn't able to reach a single important conclusion. The first half-day went by without any sensible idea coming into my head. Only at night, when I was actually asleep, did enlightenment emerge. I had gone to bed, tired out by my fruitless exertions, and had fallen into the first light slumber. A moment later I sat up as if a shock had passed through my body. Suddenly I had an idea upon which an investigation could be based. The letters were lying on my bedside table. A waft of Chypre had been exhaled from them and had reached my nostrils. Chypre is a scent used by the most distinguished people. I fetched some lights, as many as I could find, and resumed my study of the letters. At once it became clear to me that I had been wasting my time on the handwriting and the contents. I needed to concentrate on outward appearances and use these as my starting-point. Whatever the turpitude of the contents, an air of great distinction surrounded their outward form. Admittedly, an intention to mislead the reader might have played a part in this. All the same, one had the sense of a distinguished house, if not of an entirely distinguished origin. A sly footman or a disgruntled lady's maid might be involved. People of this sort might have purloined their employers' writing-paper. From the scent I did not expect any enlightenment, but . . . the paper! I know something about different kinds of writing-paper. It was the most exquisite and also the most expensive one that had ever come into my hands. So it was a fairly costly

luxury to send out these letters in any quantity. If the sender had not stolen the paper, he must be in a way of life in which he could afford the luxury.

‘Early the following morning I dressed in a nondescript style and drove to the shops of some of the better stationers of Vienna. I laid down a torn-off scrap of blank paper on the counter and asked for the same kind. The answer which I was given was the one which I expected. The stationer did not stock this paper. It was too dear and there would be a dearth of customers. This information pleased me greatly, because it narrowed down the scope of my investigation.

‘Now I entered in some excitement the shop in the Graben of “L. Wiegand, Purveyor to the Imperial and Royal Court”. I was well aware that this establishment possessed unquestionably the most distinguished clientele in the city. I showed the pattern and the proprietor came to serve me personally. He immediately laid an elegant box of 100 sheets of the right paper, with the corresponding number of envelopes, before me. ‘60 crowns’. I made the purchase and thereupon asked for a private interview.

‘The proprietor led the way into his little office behind the shop.

“I should like to know, Herr Wiegand,” I began, “whether this paper is stocked by any other shop in Vienna.”

“Certainly not,” he answered confidently. “The source from which I get it is a trade secret.”

“It’s manufactured in England,” I put in, wanting to show off my expertise a little.

“Yes, indeed, but there’s only one factory capable of making it. Other shops,” he added contemptuously, “wouldn’t have any use for it. It would stay on their shelves.”

“Do you sell much of it?”

Anonymous Letters

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"Do you sell much of it?"

Anonymous Letters

“Oh, a great deal. I’ve got no complaints.”

‘I saw that I had gone about things in the wrong way. If I allowed him to go on singing his own praises I’d find myself further and further away from my objective. Therefore, with the idea of presenting my credentials, I took a dozen of the anonymous letters out of my pocket and showed him the address on the envelopes. The effect was highly gratifying. His face at once took on an expression of marked respect.

“Herr Wiegand,” I said “You’re a Court purveyor and so I’m sure you’d appreciate the chance of obliging the Court.”

‘He bowed very devotedly and laid his hand on his heart. The implication was that he was even willing to give his life, if it was for the Imperial Court!

“Well, Herr Wiegand,” I went on, “you’ll be earning the thanks of the highest people in the land if you’ll just answer a few questions. Do you really sell much of this paper?”

“It’s my business, sir. I handle it along with the rest of my stationery. But naturally I couldn’t make my living out of this kind alone.”

“So I imagine. Would you be willing to tell me the names of the principal customers of this writing-paper? Please understand, Herr Wiegand, that an accurate answer to this question is specially important to Their Highnesses.”

‘The man was all deference and anxiety to assist. He bowed double whenever I mentioned my distinguished connections. After a little thought he confessed that he only had three customers for the paper. He supplied it to the Serbian Court. Lady Primrose also bought some for the British Embassy. But far the biggest custom came from Countess Tildi Leys, who visited the shop at least once a month to get another box.

“Thank you, Herr Wiegand. I won’t fail to mention your kind assistance in the highest places.”

‘With this I took my leave. I was satisfied, because now the scope of my inquiry had become very narrow indeed. There were just three possibilities and all of them were of equal interest to me. I needed to appraise them one by one, for it has always been a principle of mine that nothing should be regarded as improbable unless there are excellent reasons for such a belief.

‘Unquestionably Countess Leys was the right person to start with. Not only was the investigation easiest in her case. There was also a definite and promising clue. Her heavy consumption of the writing-paper was significant, to say the least.

‘I looked at my watch and saw that it was ten o’clock. Now, I had discovered from the postmarks on the letters that although they were posted in different places the time of posting was almost invariably the same: getting on towards mid-day.

‘I gave my coachman the address of the Reisnerstrasse and stopped him opposite the Leys Palace. There I remained, leaning back in my seat and keeping watch. In my business it’s necessary to have a lot of patience. I didn’t allow the long wait to upset me and kept a sharp eye on anybody coming out of the Palace. But the servants didn’t engage my interest. Two things had become clear to me. First, the letters hadn’t originated in the servants’ quarters. If the Countess only used about one box of writing-paper a month—which in normal conditions was admittedly a great deal—it would have been impossible for the paper for all those letters to be stolen without the deficiency being noticed. And, secondly, someone who writes that sort of letter doesn’t entrust its delivery to servants. Instead, the posting becomes a highly personal matter.

‘I had been waiting for about an hour when a magnifi

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cent-looking porter emerged from the palace gates and waved a carriage out into the street. I gave a sign to my coachman and we followed the other vehicle.

'As long as we kept moving I remained seated peacefully in the assurance that nothing could happen. But when a halt was made after a roundabout drive lasting half an hour, I quickly jumped out of my carriage. We were in the Schottenring in glorious Spring sunshine.

'In the course of a quick scrutiny I saw that there was a letter-box nearby. Meanwhile an elegant young lady of quite extraordinary beauty, a real fair-haired Madonna, descended from the carriage in front with the assistance of a flunkey. She walked towards the letter-box, but I was there first and opened the metal flap as if I wanted to give way to her or make her task easier. She thanked me with a slight nod of her head and an obliging smile. Then as she tried to slip her letter into the box, I snatched it out of her fingers with a quick movement and put it safely away in my pocket.

'She looked up at me as if paralysed by the shock. For the moment she said nothing and seemed close to fainting. "You must excuse me, Countess," I said. "It had to be done."

'Now she was able to find words again.

"Who are you? What do you want? It's infamous, what you've done. Give me my letter back or I'll call the police."

"That's the best thing you can possibly do, Countess. You may be interested to know that there's a police station just here. So, if it's convenient . . . I've got one or two other letters here, which we can compare with the new one."

'I took a wad of the letters out of my pocket and showed it to her. She went very pale and almost completely lost her self-possession. The flunkey, who appeared to have just noticed that there was something amiss, came up as if to protect her.

"Before we go any further, Countess, please get rid of

this fellow. It's best if he doesn't hear what we're talking about."

'One flash from her eyes sent the timid soul about his business

"And now, Countess, let me introduce myself. My name is Dagobert Trostler. You may be glad to know that I don't hold any official position, but I've been asked by Their Highnesses to put an end to an ugly persecution. This is the last letter of its kind that you'll ever write."

'She nodded dumbly and as she seemed at the end of her resources I began to feel sorry for her. What do you expect? All of us have our weaknesses and I've never been able to resist feminine beauty. Yes, she was guilty all right, but she was charming.

"We can't stand about all day," I continued. "Would you like me to get into your carriage or would you prefer to come for a walk with me and let our vehicles follow?"

'She preferred the second alternative and so we walked along confidentially side by side.

"What are you going to do now, Herr Trostler?" she asked.

"What I'm compelled to do, Countess. I shall report back to my distinguished clients."

"Will you give them my name?"

"I'm afraid I must."

"It would be a sentence of death for me."

"Of social death perhaps, but the sentence would be deserved."

"Not only social death. If you do that, I swear this will be my last day of life."

'I looked at her. What she had said was not just an empty phrase. A flicker in her eyes told me that her will was inflexible. Well, you know, Frau Violet, when all's said and done one isn't a monster. Of course she had committed a nasty and hateful crime. This paragon of maidenly beauty

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had written down words on paper, day after day, which would have brought a blush to the cheeks of a sergeant of Dragoons. But as for suicide, I didn't want that on my conscience!

'You didn't let her go free, Dagobert?' asked Frau Violet with a dismay which she could scarcely hide.

'No, indeed. Punishment was certainly required. I was wavering only because I wondered if it had to be the death penalty. One or two facts about the Leys family were stored up in my memory. The father, an alcoholic, had died in delirium. A brother was an epileptic. Unquestionably there was some congenital taint, which explained the perverse habit of this young lady of writing down disgraceful things on paper.'

'Congenital taint!' repeated Frau Violet with obvious displeasure. 'That's the usual excuse. Let's be honest, Dagobert, and admit that you were looking for some mitigation of the offence.'

'Not so much mitigation, but a psychological reason for an act that would otherwise seem inexplicable. After a long argument I still refused to make any promise, but I agreed to try and shield the Countess's name if it was at all possible. At that stage she took a small golden box out of her hand-bag, opened it and showed me what was inside. There were some sizable lumps of cyanide. I'm familiar with that particular poison, and the quantity was enough to destroy a whole generation root and branch. Without any play-acting, but convincingly, she repeated that she would take her life that same day if I revealed her name.'

'I took the little box out of her hand, so as to be able to admire the wonderfully delicate workmanship. It was a miniature masterpiece in the baroque style. Of course I refused to give it back. I made a pact with her. I promised to pay her a visit later that same day and return the box with its contents. She in her turn promised not to do any-

thing rash or indiscreet and definitely to abandon any intention of suicide if I was successful in bringing the whole affair to a conclusion without betraying her identity.'

'Didn't you offer her any reward for her splendid performance?' asked Frau Violet with a good deal of ill-humour.

'On the contrary, I prescribed a punishment for her. Our pact was absolutely clear. I'm in favour of clarity in all such agreements. If I failed to shield her by keeping her name secret, then *vogue la galère*, she was free to do whatever she thought right. But if I succeeded in my efforts on her behalf she had to perform a penance.'

'What penance?' Frau Violet wanted to know.

'I think I was sufficiently severe. The solemn promise that she wouldn't do anything of the kind again didn't count as a penance, of course. That went without saying. No, I insisted on either two years in a convent or five years' exile from Vienna, which should begin immediately. Failing one or other of these alternatives. . . . But she rapidly decided in favour of the exile, whereupon we parted with a friendly handshake.

'I drove straight to the Archducal Palace and was admitted without question, although Their Highnesses were at luncheon and I was most improperly dressed for such an occasion. The Imperial couple were eating by themselves. At a single gesture from the hostess a place was laid for me and I set to with a will, for my expedition had given me a good appetite.

'As long as the servants were still waiting at table not a word was said about the matter which had brought me there. But when the crumbs had been swept away and the air was at last clear, His Imperial Highness turned to our private business.

"Well now, my dear Herr Dagobert," he began with a smile. Please note, dear lady, that he called me Dagobert,

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no doubt because he'd heard it was the way I was always addressed among friends. So he wanted to show me some special sign of favour. "No doubt," he went on, "you've come to ask for some further information, but unfortunately we're not able to help you."

"I've really come," I replied, "as a messenger-boy": and I took the letter, which I had rescued from the pillar-box, out of my pocket and handed it respectfully to the Archduchess, to whom it was addressed.

'As you can imagine, she was not exactly enraptured. She had already suffered enough from such letters.

"I'd like to draw Your Imperial Highness's attention," I went on, "to one particular circumstance. This letter hasn't got a postmark."

'It was the Archduke who first saw the significance of my remark.

"Yes, but in that case, Herr Dagobert, you must have found the criminal. You've succeeded again. What other explanation can there be?"

"The explanation, Your Highness, is that I've discovered the source of all your affliction and stopped it up for good. That was the last of these letters. There won't be any more. Even in this case I was able to do without the services of the Post Office. I guarantee that no repetition will occur."

"Many, many thanks, Herr Dagobert."

'The Archduchess thanked me in her turn with great warmth and asked: "So who sent the letters?"

"A lady."

"A lady? I can't believe it."

"It's true, Your Highness. A society lady."

"The Imperial couple had to make an effort before they could bring themselves to believe what I'd just told them. Then, of course, they were all agog to discover the letter-writer's name.

‘I first of all gave the details of my investigation as far as these seemed communicable and I was interrupted again and again by their complimentary remarks. No doubt I’m guilty of vanity, but I was never the sort of person to hide his light under a bushel.

‘At the end of my report, when I came to the matter of the name, I said that I’d leave the decision, whether I should reveal it or not to Their Highnesses’ wisdom and sense of charity. I gave a true account of the situation and did not hide my opinion that any disclosure of the name would probably lead to a catastrophe.

‘The Archduke wrinkled his brow and observed that this was hardly an occasion for the exercise of any special degree of mercy.

‘That’s exactly my opinion,’ Frau Violet interrupted. With some justification, she held strong views about people who wrote anonymous letters.

‘Nevertheless I asked for clemency,’ I continued, ‘and gave my reasons for doing so. I was convinced that the threat of suicide had not been an empty turn of phrase. As a proof of my contention I mentioned the golden box with the lumps of cyanide and added that I had promised to return it on that same day.

“‘You can’t do that, Herr Dagobert,” said the Archduke impulsively.

“‘I’ve given my promise, Your Highness. And also, when someone has made a resolution of that kind, they’ll find a way of carrying it out even without a box of cyanide. I’m prepared to give the lady’s name if Your Highnesses insist on it, but I’d like to mention one practical ground for clemency. Your Highnesses are anxious to have everything settled quietly and without fuss. If there’s a suicide it’s impossible to ensure that some letter isn’t left behind, which could lead to sensational and unwelcome consequences. And also I’ve thought fit to impose, I hope with

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your approval, a punishment of five years' exile from Vienna."

"The Archduke was quick to agree with my view and this change of attitude on his part rather astonished me.

"Incidentally," I said with a glance towards his lady, "I think we ought to hear the Archduchess's verdict."

"The Archduchess had been contemplating the deadly poison in the box, which she had taken in her hand. Now she looked up and replied: "It's not for me to pronounce a death sentence."

"She gave the box back to me, thanked me cordially once more and gave me her hand to kiss. As she withdrew from the room, the Archduke touched me lightly on the shoulder. I took this as a sign that I should stay behind for a confidential word with him, and I was not mistaken.

"Just one second, Herr Dagobert," he said when the lady had gone. "There's something I'd like to tell you. I know now who the letter-writer is. You see, I noticed at a glance what you and my wife both overlooked. In the middle of all the ornamentation on the lid of that box, engraved very small and almost concealed, there's a coat-of-arms which I recognized."

"I took out the box again and confirmed the truth of what he said, not without some shame. I had indeed overlooked the tiny shield.

"All the same, you were a lot cleverer than I was, Herr Dagobert. It's really a very sad story. I was in love with this lady and I think I can say that she cared for me. It's quite possible that her love turned into a distorted image of itself and became hatred. It's no bad thing if the lady is granted a few years of leisure at one of her castles, or in London or Paris for that matter, to reflect on the error of her ways"

"And that, Frau Violet, is the story of my first case with anonymous letters."

Baldwin Groller

‘But you saw the Countess again, Dagobert?’

‘Of course. I saw her that same day, as I had promised.’

‘Well?’

‘She was composed and ready for any eventuality. She was sorry for what she had done and accepted her punishment.’

‘That was a lovely punishment, living in castles or going to Paris.’

‘But still a punishment, Frau Violet, which opened up the possibility of self-examination and even complete reform, whereas—’

‘You wouldn’t ooze quite so much loving-kindness, my dear, if the girl hadn’t been pretty.’

‘Possibly. I won’t protest too much,’ Dagobert replied, tugging again at his tuft of hair. ‘At any rate I was and am quite content with my part in the affair. The Countess asked me to keep the little box as a memento and a pledge of her change of heart. She said I should have something to remember her by, as she would always think of me with gratitude. I accepted and added the trinket to my collection.’

‘The only thing that occurs to me, Dagobert, is that I’ve never in my life heard of a noble family called Leys.’

‘And did you imagine, dear lady, that I’d give the name of a real living person. The name I gave you was naturally invented.’

‘But the real person is alive?’

‘She’s alive and so far she’s kept her promise. There’s very little likelihood that she’ll come back to Vienna in the near future, or indeed ever. She married a foreign peer and keeps up quite a state, I believe.’

‘What mainly interests me,’ put in Andreas Grumbach, who had hitherto been listening in silence, ‘is how a well-brought-up girl of good family can possibly take such a dreadful and dishonourable step.’

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'You've brought us back to our starting-point,' Dagobert countered. 'I only told you my story to establish the principle that prejudices ought to be avoided. "No woman is capable of writing letters like that" was what Frau Violet told us in the most positive and categorical manner. I've just established that a woman, indeed a tender young girl, can write like that and worse. I don't mean to convey that these letters of yours are necessarily a woman's work. I simply ask for a little caution and avoidance of over-hasty conclusions.'

'Now at last I understand,' said Frau Violet, 'why you were so upset about the cheap pretentiousness of our correspondent's stationery, Dagobert.'

'Absolutely right, dear lady. Yes, it isn't always quite so easy. At least 20,000 or 30,000 people in Vienna write on this kind of paper. It wouldn't be worth my while making the round of the stationers.'

'But you'll go to some trouble, Dagobert?'

'Certainly, I'll go to a lot of trouble, dear lady.'

'You promise?'

'I promise.'

Dagobert packed up the letters and made a definite point with Grumbach that any ones which arrived in future, which they were bound to do, should be spared from the waste-paper basket. They could remain unread, as in the past, and in the case of Frau Violet it was actually preferable that they should be unread, but they had to be handed over to him. The more he had to work on, the better. This case was definitely more difficult than the earlier one and a careful search for clues was required. This involved the study of each individual letter, without exception.

Frau Violet was very impatient. If at all possible, she would have liked the mystery to be solved the next day. But Dagobert warned her that it would take time. He could not even promise that he would be successful in lifting the

veil and weeks, if not months, were likely to elapse before he could report progress. Finally, so as to have some peace, he forbade Frau Violet to mention the affair at all. He himself would bring up the subject if he had anything to report. Until then, all the talk in the world would serve no purpose.

Frau Violet listened and obeyed. She asked no more questions although the strain on her nerves was terrible. It was torture for her to contain her curiosity. After dinner, when the three of them were sitting together and chattering in the smoking-room—she in her favourite seat by the marble chimney-piece, Dagobert opposite and Andreas Grumbach in his comfortable leather chair drawn back into the room—she often cast an imploring look at Dagobert.

She had held out bravely for several days when Dagobert allowed himself to be melted by her inquiring glances.

‘It’s coming along, Frau Violet,’ he volunteered. ‘Progress is definitely being made. We already have one or two small clues.’

‘Have you really discovered something, Dagobert?’ she asked in great excitement.

‘Very little, but at any rate it’s something to go on. Perhaps it’s even the famous point of Archimedes’

‘What sort of point is that?’

‘It’s the pivotal point for lifting the world. As you’re well aware, Archimedes——’

‘Yes, I know, but don’t let’s bring mythology into this, Dagobert.’

‘With respect, my dear, Archimedes isn’t a mythical figure——’

‘As far as I’m concerned he is. Anyway, let’s leave all these Archimandrites, or whatever they’re called, in peace. I’m prepared to accept whatever you say about them, but now tell me what you’ve discovered.’

‘Just a few small details. Well then, the writer—I’m

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‘And equipped with all this knowledge, Dagobert, are you going to look for your man?’

‘Sultan Flor is a light-yellow Turkish tobacco, which is cut rather long and fine. It’s only used in self-made cigarettes, or conceivably in a long-stemmed Turkish pipe. That’s why I have to reserve judgment on my original view that we’re concerned with cigarettes. Our man could also be a pipe-smoker, but people who smoke that special sort of pipe are not nearly as numerous as cigarette-smokers. Sultan Flor is quite a good tobacco and made to measure for those who want to smoke something half-way decent at not too great a cost. You get something pretty solid for your money.’

‘It’s very comforting, what you say,’ Frau Violet commented, leaving it to be inferred that she was slightly irritated at the scarcity of the information that had been disclosed. But on that particular day Dagobert refused to say another word and there was nothing she could do about it.

Fortunately for her, Frau Violet had no cause to concern herself during the next week with the disagreeable business of the letters. Her head was full of other matters and she had plenty to do. There were to be two big evening parties at the Grumbachs’ in one week. Dagobert was responsible for them, but he kept himself hidden behind the figure of Andreas Grumbach. Frau Violet was to remain in the dark about his intentions. He wanted a chance to observe the whole Grumbach circle at close range in comfort. There would have been too many people to fit into one evening, so two entertainments had to be arranged. The guests were divided up. The first evening was for Andreas’ friends and the second for Frau Violet’s. Preparing for two such occasions and then presiding over them was no light matter. It was no wonder that Dagobert enjoyed a respite from Frau Violet’s questions during this time.

When at last the whole rumpus was over, the three of

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them were able to settle down in the smoking-room again for one of their sessions. Dagobert began by complimenting his hostess on her two parties.

‘The whole town’s talking about them,’ he said, ‘and everyone’s full of admiration for your housewifely virtues, Frau Violet.’

‘And were you pleased with me too, Dagobert?’

‘I was simply delighted.’

‘That’s good, because I know you’re an exacting critic, Dagobert. But I can’t get rid of a certain suspicion. Looking back, I have the feeling that I was really giving these parties for you.’

‘For me?’

‘Yes, to help your investigations. I think you wanted all these people to come because of your interest in the business of the letters.’

‘I bow my head in submission, dear lady. You’ve seen right through me.’

‘Well, has it at least helped you at all?’

‘Yes, I believe we’re a step further forward. It seemed clear from the letters that their writer belonged to your circle, perhaps even the most intimate circle. I’d have regarded it as some sort of success if the outcome of these parties had been a purely negative one and if I’d become convinced that the writer didn’t in fact belong to the circle of your close friends.’

‘It would be a great relief to me, Dagobert, if you’d come to such a view. I wouldn’t have minded all my trouble over the parties going for nothing.’

‘But I’d have a bad conscience over causing you the trouble.’

‘Did you find anything out, Dagobert?’

‘I was able to strengthen an opinion I’d formed, and that’s of some value. I’m following up a line of inquiry which I believe is the right one.’

‘It would be marvellous, Dagobert, if you were able to solve the problem for us. Tell us whom you suspect.’

‘That would be premature, dear lady. Guesses aren’t very helpful. We need to have proofs.’

‘Don’t torture me so, Dagobert. You know something, so say what it is.’

‘It wouldn’t be right to talk so soon. I’m taking it for granted, dear lady, that you yourself haven’t spoken about this ugly business to anybody.’

‘Of course not. At least, I admit that I’ve poured out my heart to one person, but that’s the same as if I’d told nobody. Walter Frankenburg——’

‘Walter Frankenburg, you say?’

‘Yes, he’s my oldest friend from the time when I was on the stage. He’s always been like a father to me. He was my witness at the altar, when Andreas and I were married. I can tell everything to somebody like that.’

‘I was watching you, dear lady, while you were talking to him at the party. I wouldn’t have made my remark if I hadn’t guessed that you’d taken him into your confidence.’

‘You can’t hold it against me, Dagobert. He’s absolutely reliable.’

‘I’d have preferred you not to say anything whatever. Did you tell him in the course of your talk that you’d put the investigations in my hands?’

‘You weren’t mentioned, Dagobert. And I repeat that I’d go to the stake for Walter Frankenburg. He’s a truly good and honourable person. But never mind that and go on about what you observed.’

‘We had the two groups of guests, Andreas’s friends and your friends. From the start I had no great hopes of the first lot. All these big industrialists and financial Barons have their own troubles without sitting down day after day and scrawling anonymous letters. They don’t even have the time for it, or at least they don’t easily give up that amount

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of time. No, the second lot, the artistic population, offered a more promising prospect.'

'On behalf of the artists, thank you for the compliment.'

'I have no wish to hurt your feelings, Frau Violet. If you insist upon it, I'm prepared to state publicly that envy, hatred and malice are failings which are never found in the world of the theatre. You see how understanding I am!'

'I don't insist upon it.'

'Good. Now, I mentioned to you the other day that the letters had probably been written by a clean-shaven man. I didn't want to imply that I could discover that simply from the handwriting. The truth is that I went through the letters very carefully with an eye to the style of expression of the writer. I was struck by certain turns of phrase which constantly recurred. To give a few examples, "It's a howl," "I was tickled pink", "a gem of a part", "untalented beast", "drum up publicity", . . . I could add any number to the list. Well, Frau Violet, don't you see a pointer in all that?'

'Indeed I do, now that you draw my attention to it.'

'I reached the conclusion that our author was somewhat effeminate and therefore likely to be one of those clean-shaven gentlemen.'

'Why must he be a gentleman and not a lady?'

'Let me remind you of the Sultan Flor!'

'There are ladies who smoke.'

'Yes, but they don't smoke pipes and they don't roll their own cigarettes. So I took a good look at your little friends at the party and when it broke up I left in the company of some people who seemed to me promising.'

'I was watching you, Dagobert. Walter Frankenburg was one of the group.'

'Yes, he came with us. And I'm happy to confirm that in those circles he's highly thought of. Outside the theatre, even, he plays the part of a noble-hearted father. We went

from your party to a coffee-house in the usual way. Obviously the evening's entertainment was reviewed in thorough-going style.'

'Was I pulled to pieces?'

'Not in the least, I assure you. On the contrary. As matter of fact, at one moment I felt tempted to start tearing you asunder myself, so as to encourage the others to do likewise.'

'A fine friend, you are!'

'I didn't do it, although I was sure it would achieve useful purpose. This letter-writer of ours must have developed a thick sediment of malice in his nature and in company in an unguarded moment, the malice would be liable to appear. You needn't worry, Frau Violet. As I say, I didn't do it. One has one's principles, and even in the greatest extremity I personally am not prepared to act as an agent provocateur.'

'With so much to gain you ought to have tried it, Dagbert.'

'Not for anything. But to continue, we got on very well of course, since we were all still feeling the after-effects of your admirable hock and your Herdsieck. I offered my best Havana cigars round the circle and asked for a cigarette in exchange. At once a dozen cases were reached towards me. I refused. I said I had a fancy for a home-made cigarette to go with my black coffee. Only one person in the group was able to oblige. I took his box in my hand. The tobacco was Sultan Flor.'

'Ah!'

'We got into conversation together. The man who had helped me out told a funny story and he began it with the words "You'll howl at this one". The story itself was pretentious and tasteless, but the introduction had caught my attention. Then he began to talk about you and he said that "Violet had given a gem of a party".'

‘Who was the man, Dagobert?’

‘If you don’t mind, I’d rather go on being cautious, Frau Violet.’

‘But you really do seem to be on the edge of a discovery.’

‘Perhaps I’ve got further even than you imagine, dear lady. I propose to visit you tomorrow morning at the unusual hour of ten o’clock. If we don’t succeed tomorrow, then I shall come at the same time on the following day. I’d be obliged if you too, Grumbach, would stay at home until I come. Your office won’t run away in the meantime.’

‘Don’t you intend to tell us any more, Dagobert?’

‘I can’t. Only one thing. If one of these letters should come before my arrival, please hold up the envelope so that the light falls on it aslant. I hope you’ll notice a new feature. My guess is that the ink will have a metallic sheen.’

When Dagobert arrived the next morning he found the Grumbachs eagerly employed in holding up to the light a letter which had just been delivered, and tilting it all over the place. Unmistakably it could be seen that the ink had a metallic, greenish-gold lustre. Frau Violet was in a state of great excitement.

‘Dagobert,’ she called, ‘you’re a sorcerer. How could you possibly know?’

‘Please excuse my unpunctuality, dear lady. I intended to be present in person when the postman came. I was well aware what time these precious letters usually arrive, but you know how apt I am to oversleep. Still, it makes no odds. Let me have a look. That’s right. The most exquisite metallic sheen, isn’t it? And now, if you’ll forgive me, I’ll make my adieux——’

‘What’s this, Dagobert, you can’t be thinking of running away. First you must explain.’

‘I can’t spare a moment if I’m to spring the trap on our villain, Frau Violet. There’s still a lot to do. But I’d like to

invite myself to dinner and at that stage I'll give you as full an account as you want.'

He hurried away, but returned punctually for the meal at five o'clock as he had promised. He ate with relish, while Frau Violet in her excitement left the most exquisite dishes practically untouched. She could hardly contain herself until the time came for his report, but she knew that he would not say a word as long as they were at table and the presence of the servants inclined her to accept his silence.

But after the meal, when she was back in her favourite place in the chimney-corner of the smoking-room and the others had made themselves comfortable, she at once asked Dagobert to tell his story.

'My work is finished, Frau Violet,' he began. 'My mission is complete. You'll never be pestered with those wretched letters again. And even you, Grumbach, will be relieved of a disagreeable experience, I suppose.'

'As far as I'm concerned,' the industrialist replied, 'my way of life wouldn't be greatly disturbed if the letters kept on coming. But I'm still deeply indebted to you once again, Dagobert.'

'Tell us!' Frau Violet insisted.

'I only wonder, dear lady, whether it wouldn't be preferable for you to just be freed from your torment without going into all the details.'

'Oh no, Dagobert, I want to know everything.'

'Good. Well then, we've got our man.'

'Who is it?'

'As I mentioned before, he's a smoker and he's clean-shaven. You already know how I arrived at those deductions. I was telling you, wasn't I, that a friend of yours offered me some of his good, wholesome, Sultan Flor tobacco?'

'What friend?'

'The next day I visited this same man at an hour when

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I was well aware that he wouldn't be at home. I knew because I had made inquiries. At that time he was engaged in a rehearsal at the theatre. My visit was both necessary and useful, because I was able to take certain precautions. When I left you this morning I went straight to Dr Weinlich, the Commissioner of Police, who's the only really capable man in our crime department. We're good friends and we often exchange news and gossip. I can even say without concert that we stimulate each other and often learn quite a lot from one another. I told him about the case and asked if he was willing to help protect the good name and the peace of mind of a distinguished household. I didn't ask for official action and indeed I said this could be ruled out in advance. All I required was an expert and observant witness of the proceedings which I had in mind. He at once agreed to join me and we drove to the house of your friend, whom we found at home on this occasion as I expected. Really, Frau Violet, your coffee today is quite excellent again and as for the brandy, I've long been meaning to ask——'

'Oh, Dagobert, never mind about the brandy! Go on with your story.'

'No, really, I happen to know quite a lot about brandy.'

'Dagobert!'

'All right, then, we called on this man at his house.'

'For Heaven's sake, can't you tell us who the man is?'

'He received us in style. At home, in his own house, he was still the noble-hearted father.'

'Dagobert. You're not telling me it's——'

'That's just what I am telling you.'

'Not Walter——'

'Walter Frankenburg, the celebrated actor and the most fatherly character in your circle.'

'But this is terrible!'

'As I say, he received us in style. He was actually on the

point of embracing me, but I gave a sign to him to desist. I made it short and to the point. I introduced the Imperial and Royal Commissioner of Police, Dr Weinlich, whom I had brought with me because we were on the track of a really ugly business. Then I took two letters out of my pocket, the one from the day before yesterday and today's one, both of them unopened.

“Do you recognize these letters, Herr Frankenburg?”

“Certainly not. Nobody's going to believe——”

“What aren't they going to believe?”

“That I wrote them.”

“But why shouldn't you have written them? What's inside them could be perfectly respectable, couldn't it?”

He saw that he had fallen into a trap and turned pale, but still looked every inch the heroic father. This was his house and he was going to show us it was his castle too. He told us he wasn't going to allow himself to be cross-examined on his own premises because of some scandalous and utterly unfounded suspicion.

“I just thought,” I countered, “that you might prefer an examination here to one in the court-room.”

“You're the one, sir, who'll have to answer for your conduct in the court-room.”

“I'm afraid you won't be able to give me that pleasure. The fact is that you're lying. That's your own affair. Unfortunately you seem to be unaware that I can produce proofs of my case and that I've got you in a steel vice. You can twist and turn as much as you like, but you won't get away.”

“What are these proofs?”

“I'm coming to them. Yesterday I did myself the honour of calling on you. I expect you found my card.”

“Yes.”

“Have you still got it?”

“Yes, here it is.”

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“That’s a pity from your point of view. You should have destroyed it, because it’s about the strongest link in the chain of evidence against you.”

“What can a visiting-card possibly prove? You’ve written a note on it, inviting me to give a lecture at the Industrialists’ Club. So far I haven’t either accepted or refused. So what have I done to incriminate myself?”

“You still don’t want to admit anything, so let’s go into the whole business in a methodical way. First of all, I could prove that the writing-paper, which was used for all this anonymous filth, is kept in one of the drawers of your bureau.”

“How can you say that?”

“Because I didn’t waste the five minutes during which I was sitting at your desk, even though your housekeeper was keeping a careful eye on me.” Here I turned to the Commissioner and asked: “What kind of scent would you say this is, on the letters?”

Dr Weinlich held them under his nose for a moment and replied: “I should say it’s a faint scent of violets.”

“Whatever it is,” I explained, “it’s a cheap scent. I’m something of an expert on scent, incidentally. But the important thing, Commissioner, is that you should sniff at this upper drawer on the right-hand side of the bureau. What can you smell?”

“It’s exactly the same scent, I can testify.”

“That’s the main thing. I can see you’re going to refuse to open the drawer, Herr Frankenburg. I shan’t oblige you to do so, although I’m sure we’d find one of our proofs inside. But it wouldn’t be a conclusive one, I admit. And I can reassure you by confessing that we haven’t brought a search-warrant with us, so we’re not in a position to bring legal pressure to bear. Actually we could easily obtain a warrant, but we don’t need one. I’ve got something better. While I was enjoying the honour of sitting at your desk, I

took the opportunity of trickling three drops of a bronze colour dissolved in a solution of water into your ink-well. I have the colour hidden in this ring that I'm wearing on my finger. You weren't able to notice my little trick, Herr Frankenburg, but it's caught you out completely. The note which I wrote on the visiting-card was the last document written at this desk with untreated ink. Whatever was written later would develop a treacherous and undeniable metallic sheen as soon as the ink dried. Commissioner, perhaps you'll be so kind as to compare these two letters. As the postmarks demonstrate, one of them was written before and one after my visit."

"Yes, it's unmistakable," Dr Weinlich confirmed.

"The fact is that you could carry out a judicial search of all the writing-desks in Vienna and in none of the others would you find this remarkable kind of ink. Do you admit now, Herr Walter Frankenburg, that I've caught you out?"

'Well, did he confess?' Frau Violet asked in a high state of excitement.

'He was a broken man. He abandoned all resistance and admitted everything. So now, Frau Violet, you must get ready for the hearing in the law-courts.'

'What are you thinking of, Dagobert? Am I supposed to appear as a witness and get myself dragged into sensational reports in all the papers?'

'Yes, I see your point, but what else can I do with the man?'

'Get him out of Vienna. Give him some penance, whatever you like. Only leave me out of it!'

'It's amazing, how mistaken one can be! I thought, since you considered the Countess's punishment much too lenient——'

'Oh, that was something quite different.'

'I don't know how different it was, but in any case I've already banished your Walter Frankenburg. He'll never

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appear on a stage in Vienna again and he'll let you have a contribution for your favourite charity, dear lady. He'll be able to read the announcement in the newspaper. The headline will be "From a scoundrel who was found out" and he won't have the slightest difficulty in recognizing himself.'

The Red Silk Scarf

Maurice Leblanc

On leaving his house one morning, at his usual early hour for going to the Law Courts, Chief-inspector Ganimard noticed the curious behaviour of an individual who was walking along the Rue Pergolèse in front of him. Shabbily dressed and wearing a straw hat, though the day was the 1st of December, the man stooped at every thirty or forty yards to fasten his boot-lace, or pick up his stick or for some other reason. And, each time, he took a little piece of orange-peel from his pocket and laid it stealthily on the kerb of the pavement. It was probably a mere display of eccentricity, a childish amusement to which no one else would have paid attention; but Ganimard was one of those shrewd observers who are indifferent to nothing that strikes their eyes and who are never satisfied until they know the secret cause of things. He therefore began to follow the man.

Now, at the moment when the fellow was turning to the right, into the Avenue de la Grand-Armée, the inspector caught him exchanging signals with a boy of twelve or thirteen, who was walking along the houses on the left-hand side. Twenty yards further, the man stooped and turned up the bottom of his trouser-legs. A bit of orange-peel marked

the place. At the same moment, the boy stopped and, with a piece of chalk, drew a white cross, surrounded by a circle, on the wall of the house next to him.

The two continued on their way. A minute later, a fresh halt. The strange individual picked up a pin and dropped a piece of orange-peel; and the boy at once made a second cross on the wall and again drew a white circle round it.

‘By Jove!’ thought the chief-inspector, with a grunt of satisfaction. ‘This is rather promising. . . . What on earth can those two merchants be plotting?’

The two ‘merchants’ went down the Avenue Friedland and the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, but nothing occurred that was worthy of special mention. The double performance was repeated at almost regular intervals and, so to speak, mechanically. Nevertheless, it was obvious, on the one hand, that the man with the orange-peel did not do his part of the business until after he had picked out with a glance the house that was to be marked, and on the other hand, that the boy did not mark that particular house until after he had observed his companion’s signal. It was certain, therefore, that there was an agreement between the two; and the proceedings presented no small interest in the chief-inspector’s eyes.

At the Place Beauveau, the man hesitated. Then, apparently making up his mind, he twice turned up and twice turned down the bottom of his trouser-legs. Hereupon, the boy sat down on the kerb, opposite the sentry who was mounting guard outside the Ministry of the Interior, and marked the flagstone with two little crosses contained within two circles. The same ceremony was gone through a little further on, when they reached the Elysée. Only, on the pavement where the President’s sentry was marching up and down, there were three signs instead of two.

‘Hang it all!’ muttered Ganimard, pale with excitement and thinking, in spite of himself, of his inveterate enemy,

Lupin, whose name came to his mind whenever a mysterious circumstance presented itself. 'Hang it all, what does it mean?'

He was nearly collaring and questioning the two 'merchants'. But he was too clever to commit so gross a blunder. The man with the orange-peel had now lit a cigarette; and the boy, also placing a cigarette-end between his lips, had gone up to him, apparently with the object of asking for a light.

They exchanged a few words. Quick as thought, the boy handed his companion an object which looked—at least, so the inspector believed—like a revolver. They both bent over this object; and the man, standing with his face to the wall, put his hand six times in his pocket and made a movement as though he were loading a weapon.

As soon as this was done, they walked briskly to the Rue de Surène; and the inspector, who followed them as closely as he was able to do without attracting their attention, saw them enter the gateway of an old house of which all the shutters were closed, with the exception of those on the third or top floor.

He hurried in after them. At the end of the carriage-entrance, he saw a large courtyard, with a house-painter's sign at the back and a staircase on the left.

He went up the stairs and, as soon as he reached the first floor, ran still faster, because he heard, right up at the top, a din as of a free-fight.

When he came to the last landing, he found the door open. He entered, listened for a second, caught the sound of a struggle, rushed to the room from which the sound appeared to proceed and remained standing on the threshold, very much out of breath and greatly surprised to see the man of the orange-peel and the boy banging the floor with chairs.

At that moment, a third person walked out of an adjoin-

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ing room. It was a young man of twenty-eight or thirty, wearing a pair of short whiskers in addition to his moustache, spectacles and a smoking-jacket with an astrakhan collar and looking like a foreigner, a Russian.

‘Good morning, Ganimard,’ he said. And turning to the two companions, ‘Thank you, my friends, and all my congratulations on the successful result. Here’s the reward I promised you.’

He gave them a hundred-franc note, pushed them outside and shut both doors.

‘I am sorry, old chap,’ he said to Ganimard. ‘I wanted to talk to you . . . wanted to talk to you badly.’

He offered him his hand and, seeing that the inspector remained flabbergasted and that his face was still distorted with anger, he exclaimed:

‘Why, you don’t seem to understand! . . . And yet it’s clear enough . . . I wanted to see you particularly. . . . So what could I do?’ And, pretending to reply to an objection, ‘No, no, old chap,’ he continued. ‘You’re quite wrong. If I had written or telephoned, you would not have come . . . or else you would have come with a regiment. Now I wanted to see you all alone; and I thought the best thing was to send those two decent fellows to meet you, with orders to scatter bits of orange-peel and draw crosses and circles, in short, to mark out your road to this place. . . . Why, you look quite bewildered! What is it? Perhaps you don’t recognize me? Lupin . . . Arsène Lupin. . . . Ransack your memory. . . . Doesn’t the name remind you of anything?’

‘You dirty scoundrel!’ Ganimard snarled between his teeth.

Lupin seemed greatly distressed, and in an affectionate voice:

‘Are you vexed? Yes, I can see it in your eyes. . . . The Dugrival business, I suppose? I ought to have waited for you to come and take me in charge? . . . There now, the

thought never occurred to me! I promise you, next time. . . .’

‘You scum of the earth!’ growled Ganimard.

‘And I thinking I was giving you a treat! Upon my word, I did. I said to myself, “That dear old Ganimard! We haven’t met for an age. He’ll simply rush at me when he sees me!”’

Ganimard, who had not yet stirred a limb, seemed to be waking from his stupor. He looked around him, looked at Lupin, visibly asked himself whether he would not do well to rush at him in reality, and then, controlling himself, took hold of a chair and settled himself in it, as though he had suddenly made up his mind to listen to his enemy.

‘Speak,’ he said. ‘And don’t waste my time with any nonsense. I’m in a hurry.’

‘That’s it’ said Lupin, ‘let’s talk. You can’t imagine a quieter place than this. It’s an old manor-house, which once stood in the open country, and it belongs to the Duc de Rochelaure. The duke, who has never lived in it, lets this floor to me and the outhouses to a painter and decorator. I always keep up a few establishments of this kind: it’s a sound, practical plan. Here, in spite of my looking like a Russian nobleman, I am M. Daubreuil, an ex-cabinet-minister. . . . You understand, I had to select a rather overstocked profession, so as not to attract attention. . . .’

‘Do you think I care a hang about all this?’ said Ganimard, interrupting him.

‘Quite right, I’m wasting words and you’re in a hurry. Forgive me. I shan’t be long now. . . . Five minutes that’s all . . . I’ll start at once. . . . Have a cigar? No? Very well no more will I.’

He sat down also, drummed his fingers on the table, while thinking, and began in this fashion.

‘On the 17th of October, 1599, on a warm and sunny autumn day. . . . Do you follow me? . . . But, now that

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come to think of it, is it really necessary to go back to the reign of Henry IV and tell you all about the building of the Pont-Neuf? No, I don't suppose you are very well up in French history; and I should only end by muddling you. Suffice it, then, for you to know that, last night, at one o'clock in the morning, a boatman passing under the last arch of the Pont-Neuf aforesaid, along the left bank of the river, heard something drop into the front part of his barge. The thing had been flung from the bridge and its evident destination was the bottom of the Seine. The bargee's dog rushed forward, barking, and, when the man reached the end of his craft, he saw the animal worrying a piece of newspaper that had served to wrap up a number of objects. He took from the dog such of the contents as had not fallen into the water, went to his cabin and examined them carefully. The result struck him as interesting; and, as the man is connected with one of my friends, he sent to let me know. This morning, I was woken up and placed in possession of the facts and of the objects which the man had collected. Here they are.'

He pointed to them, spread out on a table. There were, first of all, the torn pieces of a newspaper. Next came a large cut-glass inkstand, with a long piece of string fastened to the lid. There was a bit of broken glass and a sort of flexible cardboard, reduced to shreds. Lastly, there was a piece of bright scarlet silk, ending in a tassel of the same material and colour.

'You see our exhibits, friend of my youth,' said Lupin. 'No doubt, the problem would be more easily solved if we had the other objects which went overboard owing to the stupidity of the dog. But it seems to me, all the same, that we ought to be able to manage, with a little reflection and intelligence. And those are just your great qualities. How does the business strike you?'

Ganimard did not move a muscle. He was willing to stand

Lupin's chaff, but his dignity commanded him not to speak a single word in answer nor even to give a nod or shake of the head that might have been taken to express approval or criticism.

'I see that we are entirely of one mind,' continued Lupin, without appearing to remark the chief-inspector's silence. 'And I can sum up the matter briefly, as told us by these exhibits. Yesterday evening, between nine and twelve o'clock, a showily-dressed young woman was wounded with a knife and then caught round the throat and choked to death by a well-dressed gentleman, wearing a single eye-glass and interested in racing, with whom the aforesaid showily-dressed young lady had been eating three meringues and a coffee éclair.'

Lupin lit a cigarette and, taking Ganimard by the sleeve:

'Aha, that's up against you, chief-inspector! You thought that, in the domain of police deductions, such feats as those were prohibited to outsiders! Wrong, sir! Lupin juggles with inferences and deductions for all the world like a detective in a novel. My proofs are dazzling and absolutely simple.'

And, pointing to the objects one by one, as he demonstrated his statement, he resumed:

'I said, after nine o'clock yesterday evening. This scrap of newspaper bears yesterday's date, with the words, "Evening edition." Also, you will see here, pasted to the paper, a bit of one of those yellow wrappers in which the subscribers' copies are sent out. These copies are always delivered by the nine-o'clock post. Therefore, it was after nine o'clock. I said, a well-dressed man. Please observe that this tiny piece of glass has the round hole of a single eye-glass at one of the edges and that the single eye-glass is an essentially aristocratic article of wear. This well-dressed man walked into a pastry-cook's shop. Here is the very thin cardboard, shaped like a box and still showing a little of the cream of the

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meringues and éclairs which were packed in it in the usual way. Having got his parcel, the gentleman with the eye-glass joined a young person whose eccentricity in the matter of dress is pretty clearly indicated by this bright-red silk scarf. Having joined her, for some reason as yet unknown, he first stabbed her with a knife and then strangled her with the help of this same scarf. Take your magnifying glass, chief-inspector, and you will see, on the silk, stains of a darker red which are, here, the marks of a knife wiped on the scarf and there, the marks of a hand, covered with blood, clutching the material. Having committed the murder, his next business is to leave no trace behind him. So he takes from his pocket, first, the newspaper to which he subscribes—a racing-paper, as you will see by glancing at the contents of this scrap; and you will have no difficulty in discovering the title—and, secondly, a cord, which, on inspection, turns out to be a length of whip-cord. These two details prove—do they not?—that our man is interested in racing and that he himself rides. Next, he picks up the fragments of his eye-glass, the cord of which has been broken in the struggle. He takes a pair of scissors—observe the hacking of the scissors—and cuts off the stained part of the scarf, leaving the other end, no doubt, in his victim's clenched hands. He makes a ball of the confectioner's cardboard box. He also puts in certain things that would have betrayed him, such as the knife, which must have slipped into the Seine. He wraps everything in the newspaper, ties it with the cord and fastens this cut-glass inkstand to it, as a make-weight. Then he makes himself scarce. A little later, the parcel falls into the waterman's barge. And there you are. Oof, it's hot work!... What do you say to the story?'

He looked at Ganimard to see what impression his speech had produced on the inspector. Ganimard did not depart from his attitude of silence.

Lupin began to laugh:

‘As a matter of fact, you’re annoyed and surprised. But you’re suspicious as well: “Why should that confounded Lupin hand the business over to me,” say you, “instead of keeping it for himself, hunting down the murderer and rifling his pockets, if there was a robbery?” The question is quite logical, of course. But—there is a “but”—I have no time, you see. I am full up with work at the present moment: a burglary in London, another at Lausanne, an exchange of children at Marseilles, to say nothing of having to save a young girl who is at this moment shadowed by death. That’s always the way: it never rains but it pours. So I said to myself, “Suppose I handed the business over to my dear old Ganimard? Now that it is half-solved for him, he is quite capable of succeeding. And what a service I shall be doing him! How magnificently he will be able to distinguish himself! No sooner said than done. At eight o’clock in the morning, I sent the joker with the orange-peel to meet you. You swallowed the bait; and you were here by nine, all on edge and eager for the fray.’

Lupin rose from his chair. He bent over to the inspector and, with his eyes on Ganimard’s, said:

‘That’s all. You now know the whole story. Presently, you will know the victim: some ballet-dancer, probably, some singer at a music-hall. On the other hand, the chances are that the criminal lives near the Pont-Neuf, most likely on the left bank. Lastly, here are all the exhibits. I make you a present of them. Set to work. I shall only keep this end of the scarf. If ever you want to piece the scarf together, bring me the other end, the one which the police will find round the victim’s neck. Bring it me in four weeks from now to the day, that is to say, on the 29th of December, at ten o’clock in the morning. You can be sure of finding me here. And don’t be afraid: this is all perfectly serious, friend of my youth; I swear it is No humbug, honour bright. You can go

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straight ahead. Oh, by the way, when you arrest the fellow with the eye-glass, be a bit careful: he is left-handed! Good-bye, old dear, and good luck to you!

Lupin spun round on his heel, went to the door, opened it and disappeared before Ganimard had even thought of taking a decision. The inspector rushed after him, but at once found that the handle of the door, by some trick of mechanism which he did not know, refused to turn. It took him ten minutes to unscrew the lock and ten minutes more to unscrew the lock of the hall-door. By the time that he had scrambled down the three flights of stairs, Ganimard had given up all hope of catching Arsène Lupin.

Besides, he was not thinking of it. Lupin inspired him with a queer, complex feeling, made up of fear, hatred, involuntary admiration and also the vague instinct that he, Ganimard, in spite of all his efforts, in spite of the persistency of his endeavours, would never get the better of this particular adversary. He pursued him from a sense of duty and pride, but with the continual dread of being taken in by that formidable hoaxter and scouted and fooled in the face of a public that was always only too willing to laugh at the chief-inspector's mishaps.

This business of the red scarf, in particular, struck him as most suspicious. It was interesting, certainly, in more ways than one, but so very improbable! And Lupin's explanation, apparently so logical, would never stand the test of a severe examination!

'No,' said Ganimard, 'that is all swank: a parcel of suppositions and guess-work based upon nothing at all. I'm not to be caught with chaff.'

* * *

When he reached the head quarters of police, at 36, Quai des Orfevres, he had quite made up his mind to treat the incident as though it had never happened.

He went up to the Criminal Investigation Department. Here, one of his fellow-inspectors said:

‘Seen the chief?’

‘No.’

‘He was asking for you just now.’

‘Oh, was he?’

‘Yes, you had better go after him.’

‘Where?’

‘To the Rue de Berne . . . there was a murder there last night.’

‘Oh! Who’s the victim?’

‘I don’t know exactly . . . a music-hall singer, I believe.’

Ganimard simply muttered:

‘By Jove!’

Twenty minutes later, he stepped out of the underground railway-station and made for the Rue de Berne.

The victim, who was known in the theatrical world by her stage-name of Jenny Saphir, occupied a small flat on the second floor of one of the houses. A policeman took the chief-inspector upstairs and showed him the way, through two sitting-rooms to a bedroom where he found the magistrates in charge of the inquiry, together with the divisional surgeon and M. Dudous, the head of the detective-service.

Ganimard started at the first glance which he gave into the room. He saw, lying on a sofa, the corpse of a young woman whose hands clutched a strip of red silk! One of the shoulders, which appeared above the low-cut bodice, wore the marks of two wounds surrounded with clotted blood. The distorted and almost blackened features still bore an expression of frenzied fear.

The divisional surgeon, who had just finished his examination, said:

‘My first conclusions are very clear. The victim was twice stabbed with a dagger and afterwards strangled. The immediate cause of death was asphyxia.’

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‘By Jove!’ thought Ganimard again, remembering Lupin’s words and the picture which he had drawn of the crime.

The examining magistrate objected:

‘But the neck shows no discoloration.’

‘She may have been strangled with a napkin or a handkerchief,’ said the doctor.

‘Most probably,’ said the chief detective, ‘with this silk scarf, which the victim was wearing and a piece of which remains, as though she had clung to it with her two hands to protect herself.’

‘But why does only that piece remain?’ asked the magistrate. ‘What has become of the other?’

The other may have been stained with blood and carried off by the murderer. You can plainly distinguish the hurried slashing of the scissors.’

‘By Jove!’ said Ganimard, between his teeth, for the third time. ‘That brute of a Lupin saw everything without seeing a thing!’

‘And what about the motive of the murder!’ asked the magistrate. ‘The locks have been forced, the cupboards turned upside down. Have you anything to tell me, M. Dudous?’

The chief of the detective-service replied:

‘I can at least suggest a supposition, derived from the statements made by the servant. The victim, who enjoyed a greater reputation on account of her looks than through her talent as a singer, went to Russia two years ago, and brought back with her a magnificent sapphire, which she appears to have received from some person of importance at the court. Since then, she went by the name of Jenny Saphir and seems generally to have been very proud of that present, although for prudence’ sake, she never wore it. I daresay that we shall not be far out if we presume the theft of the sapphire to have been the cause of the crime.’

‘But did the maid know where the stone was?’

‘No, nobody did. And the disorder of the room would tend to prove that the murderer did not know either.’

‘We will question the maid,’ said the examining-magistrate.

M. Dudouis took the chief-inspector aside and said:

‘You’re looking very old-fashioned, Ganimard. What’s the matter? Do you suspect anything?’

‘Nothing at all, chief.’

‘That’s a pity. We could do with a bit of showy work in the department. This is one of a number of crimes, all of the same class, of which we have failed to discover the perpetrator. This time, we want the criminal . . . and quickly!’

‘A difficult job, chief.’

‘It’s got to be done. Listen to me, Ganimard. According to what the maid says, Jenny Saphir led a very regular life. For a month past, she was in the habit of frequently receiving visits, on her return from the music-hall, that is to say, at about half-past ten, from a man who would stay until midnight or so. “He’s a society man,” Jenny Saphir used to say, “and he wants to marry me”. This society man took every precaution to avoid being seen, such as turning up his coat-collar and lowering the brim of his hat when he passed the porter’s box. And Jenny Saphir always made a point of sending away her maid, even before he came. This is the man whom we have to find.’

‘Has he left no traces?’

‘None at all. It is obvious that we have to deal with a very clever scoundrel, who prepared his crime beforehand and committed it with every possible chance of escaping unpunished. His arrest would be a great feather in our cap. I rely on you, Ganimard.’

‘Ah, you rely on me, chief?’ replied the inspector.

‘Well, we shall see . . . we shall see . . . I don’t say no. . . . Only....’

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He seemed in a very nervous condition; and his agitation struck M. Dudouis.

‘Only,’ continued Ganimard, ‘only I swear . . . do you hear, chief? I swear. . . .’

‘What do you swear?’

‘Nothing. . . . We shall see, chief . . . we shall see. . . .’

Ganimard did not finish his sentence until he was outside, alone. And he finished it aloud, stamping his foot, in a tone of the most violent anger:

‘Only, I swear to Heaven that the arrest shall be effected by my own means, without my employing a single one of the clues with which that villain has supplied me. Ah, no! Ah, no! . . .’

Railing against Lupin, furious at being mixed up in this business and resolved, nevertheless, to get to the bottom of it, he wandered aimlessly about the streets. His brain was seething with irritation; and he tried to adjust his ideas a little and to discover, among the chaotic facts, some trifling detail, unperceived by all, unsuspected by Lupin himself, that might lead him to success.

He lunched hurriedly at a bar, resumed his stroll and suddenly stopped, petrified, astounded and confused. He was walking under the gateway of the very house in the Rue de Surène to which Lupin had enticed him a few hours earlier! A force stronger than his own will was drawing him there once more. The solution of the problem lay there. There and there alone were all the elements of the truth. Do and say what he would, Lupin’s assertions were so precise, his calculations so accurate that, worried to the innermost recesses of his being by so prodigious a display of perspicacity, he could not do other than take up the work at the point where his enemy had left it.

Abandoning all further resistance, he climbed the three flights of stairs. The door of the flat was open. No one had touched the exhibits. He put them in his pocket and walked away.

From that moment, he reasoned and acted, so to speak, mechanically, under the influence of the master whom he could not choose but obey.

Admitting that the unknown person whom he was seeking lived in the neighbourhood of the Pont-Neuf, it became necessary to discover, somewhere between that bridge and the Rue de Berne, the first-class confectioner's shop, open in the evenings, at which the cakes were bought. This did not take long to find. A pastry-cook near the Gare Saint-Lazare showed him some little cardboard boxes, identical in material and shape with the one in Ganimard's possession. Moreover, one of the shop girls remembered having served, on the previous evening, a gentleman whose face was almost concealed in the collar of his fur-coat, but whose eye-glass she had happened to notice.

'That's one clue checked,' thought the inspector. 'Our man wears an eye-glass.'

He next collected the pieces of the racing-paper and showed them to a newsvendor, who easily recognized the *Turf Illustré*. Ganimard at once went to the offices of the *Turf* and asked to see the list of subscribers. Going through the list, he jotted down the names and addresses of all those who lived anywhere near the Pont-Neuf and principally—because Lupin had said so—those on the left bank of the river.

He then went back to the Criminal Investigation Department, took half a dozen men and packed them off with the necessary instructions.

At seven o'clock in the evening, the last of these men returned and brought good news with him. A certain M. Prevailles, a subscriber to the *Turf*, occupied an entresol flat on the Quai des Augustins. On the previous evening, he left his place, wearing a fur-coat, took his letters and his paper, the *Turf Illustré*, from the porter's wife, walked away and returned home at midnight. This M. Prevailles

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wore a single eye-glass. He was a regular race-goer and himself owned several hacks which he either rode himself or jobbed out.

The inquiry had taken so short a time and the results obtained were so exactly in accordance with Lupin's predictions that Ganimard felt quite overcome on hearing the detective's report. Once more he was measuring the prodigious extent of the resources at Lupin's disposal. Never in the course of his life—and Ganimard was already well-advanced in years—had he come across such perspicacity, such a quick and far-seeing mind.

He went in search of M. Dudouis:

'Everything's ready, chief. Have you a warrant?'

'Eh?'

'I said, everything is ready for the arrest, chief.'

'You know the name of Jenny Saphir's murderer?'

'Yes.'

'But how? Explain yourself.'

Ganimard had a sort of scruple of conscience, blushed a little and nevertheless said:

'An accident, chief. The murderer threw everything that was likely to compromise him into the Seine. Part of the parcel was picked up and handed to me.'

'By whom?'

'A boatman who refused to give his name, for fear of getting into trouble. But I had all the clues I wanted. It was not so difficult as I expected.'

And the inspector described how he had gone to work.

'And you call that an accident!' cried M. Dudouis. 'And you say that it was not difficult! Why, it's one of your finest performances! Finish it yourself, Ganimard, and be prudent.'

Ganimard was eager to get the business done. He went to the Quai des Augustins with his men and distributed them around the house. He questioned the portress, who said that

her tenant took his meals out of doors, but made a point of looking in after dinner.

A little before nine o'clock, in fact, leaning out of her window, she warned Ganimard, who at once gave a low whistle. A gentleman in a tall hat and a fur-coat was coming along the pavement beside the Seine. He crossed the road and walked up to the house.

Ganimard stepped forward:

'M. Prevailles, I believe?'

'Yes, but who are you?'

'I have a commission to . . .'

He had not time to finish his sentence. At the sight of the men appearing out of the shadow, Prevailles quickly retreated to the wall and faced his adversaries, with his back to the door of a shop on the ground-floor, the shutters of which were closed:

'Stand back!' he cried. 'I don't know you!'

His right hand brandished a heavy stick, while his left was slipped behind him and seemed to be trying to open the door.

Ganimard had an impression that the man might escape through this way and through some secret outlet:

'None of this nonsense,' he said, moving closer to him. 'You're caught. . . . You had better come quietly.'

But just as he was laying hold of Prevailles' stick, Ganimard remembered the warning which Lupin gave him: Prevailles was left-handed; and it was his revolver for which he was feeling behind his back.

The inspector ducked his head. He had noticed the man's sudden movement. Two reports rang out. No one was hit.

A second later, Prevailles received a blow under the chin from the butt-end of a revolver, which brought him down where he stood. He was entered at the Dépôt soon after nine o'clock.

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Ganimard enjoyed a great reputation even at that time. But this capture, so quickly effected, by such a very simple means, and at once made public by the police, won him a sudden celebrity. Prevailles was forthwith saddled with all the murders that had remained unpunished; and the newspapers vied with one another in extolling Ganimard's prowess.

The case was conducted briskly at the start. It was first of all ascertained that Prevailles, whose real name was Thomas Derocq, had already been in trouble. Moreover, the search instituted in his rooms, while not supplying any fresh proofs, at least led to the discovery of a ball of whip-cord similar to the cord used for doing up the parcel and also to the discovery of daggers which would have produced a wound similar to the wounds on the victim.

But, on the eighth day, everything was changed. Until then Prevailles had refused to reply to the questions put to him; but now, assisted by his counsel, he pleaded a circumstantial alibi and maintained that he was at the Folies-Bergères on the night of the murder.

As a matter of fact, the pockets of his dinner-jacket contained the counterfoil of a stall-ticket and a programme of the performance, both bearing the date of that evening.

'An alibi prepared in advance,' objected the examining-magistrate.

'Prove it,' said Prevailles.

The prisoner was confronted with the witnesses for the prosecution. The young lady from the confectioner's 'thought she knew' the gentleman with the eye-glass. The hall-porter in the Rue de Berne 'thought he knew' the gentleman who used to come to see Jenny Saphir. But no body dared to make a more definite statement.

The examination, therefore, led to nothing of a precise character, provided no solid basis whereon to found a serious accusation

The judge sent for Ganimard and told him of his difficulty:

‘I can’t possibly persist, at this rate. There is no evidence to support the charge.’

‘But surely you are convinced in your own mind, monsieur le juge d’instruction! Prevailles would never have resisted his arrest unless he was guilty.’

‘He says that he thought he was being assaulted. He also says that he never set eyes on Jenny Saphir and, as a matter of fact, we can find no one to contradict his assertion. Then again, admitting that the sapphire has been stolen, we have not been able to find it at his flat.’

‘Nor anywhere else,’ suggested Ganimard.

‘Quite true, but that’s no evidence against him. I’ll tell you what we shall want, M. Ganimard, and that very soon: the other end of this red scarf.’

‘The other end?’

‘Yes, for it is obvious, that, if the murderer took it away with him, the reason was that the stuff is stained with the marks of the blood on his fingers.’

Ganimard made no reply. For several days, he had felt that the whole business was tending to this conclusion. There was no other proof possible. Given the silk scarf—and in no other circumstances—Prevailles’ guilt was certain. Now Ganimard’s position required that Prevailles’ guilt should be established. He was responsible for the arrest, it had cast a glamour around him, he had been praised to the skies as the most formidable adversary of criminals; and he would look absolutely ridiculous if Prevailles were released.

Unfortunately, the one and only indispensable proof was in Lupin’s pocket. How was he to get hold of it?

Ganimard cast about, exhausted himself with fresh investigations from start to finish, spent sleepless nights in turning over the mystery of the Rue de Berne, studied the

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records of Prevailles' life, sent ten men hunting after the invisible sapphire. Everything was useless.

On the 28th of December, the examining-magistrate stopped him in one of the passages of the Law Courts:

'Well, M. Ganimard, any news?'

'No, monsieur le juge d'instruction.'

'Then I shall dismiss the case.'

'Wait one day longer.'

'What's the use? We want the other end of the scarf; have you got it?'

'I shall have it to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!'

'Yes, but please lend me the piece in your possession.'

'What if I do?'

'If you do, I promise to let you have the whole scarf complete.'

'Very well, that's understood.'

Ganimard followed the examining-magistrate to his room and came out with the piece of silk:

'Hang it all!' he growled. 'Yes, I will go and fetch the proof and I shall have it too . . . always presuming that Master Lupin has the courage to keep the appointment.'

In point of fact, he did not doubt for a moment that Master Lupin would have this courage; and that was just what exasperated him. Why had Lupin insisted on this meeting? What was his object, in the circumstances?

Anxious, furious, and full of hatred, he resolved to take every precaution necessary not only to prevent his falling into a trap himself, but to make his enemy fall into one, now that the opportunity offered. And, on the next day, which was the 29th of December, the date fixed by Lupin, after spending the night studying the old manor-house in the Rue de Surène and convincing himself that there was no other outlet than the front-door, he warned his men that he

was going on a dangerous expedition and arrived with them on the field of battle.

He posted them in a café and gave them formal instructions: if he showed himself at one of the third-floor windows, or if he failed to return within an hour, the detectives were to enter the house and arrest any one who tried to leave it.

The chief-inspector made sure that his revolver was in working order and that he could take it from his pocket easily. Then he went upstairs.

He was surprised to find things as he had left them, the doors open and the locks broken. After ascertaining that the windows of the principal room looked out on the street, he visited the three other rooms that made up the flat. There was no one there.

'Master Lupin was afraid,' he muttered, not without a certain satisfaction.

'Don't be silly,' said a voice behind him.

Turning round, he saw an old workman, wearing a house-painter's long smock, standing in the doorway.

'You needn't bother your head,' said the workman. 'It's I, Lupin. I have been working in the painter's shop since early morning. This is when we knock off for breakfast. So I came upstairs.'

He looked at Ganimard with a quizzing smile and cried:

'Pon my word, this is a gorgeous moment I owe you, old chap! I wouldn't sell it for ten years of your life; and yet you know how I love you! What do you think of it, artist? Wasn't it well thought-out and well foreseen? Foreseen from alpha to omega? Did I understand the business? Did I penetrate the mystery of the scarf? I'm not saying that there were no holes in my argument, no links missing in the chain. . . . But what a masterpiece of intelligence! Ganimard, what a reconstruction of events! What an intuition of everything that had taken place and of everything that was going to take place, from the discovery of the crime to

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our arrival here in search of a proof! What a really marvellous divination! Have you the scarf?’

‘Yes, half of it. Have you the other?’

‘Here it is. Let’s compare.’

They spread the two pieces of silk on the table. The cuts made by the scissors corresponded exactly. Moreover, the colours were identical.

‘But I presume,’ said Lupin, ‘that this was not the only thing you came for. What you are interested in seeing is the marks of the blood. Come with me, Ganimard: it’s rather dark in here.’

They moved into the next room, which, though it overlooked the courtyard, was lighter; and Lupin held his piece of silk against the window-pane:

‘Look’ he said, making room for Ganimard.

The inspector gave a start of delight. The marks of the five fingers and the print of the palm were distinctly visible. The evidence was undeniable. The murderer had seized the stuff in his blood-stained hand, in the same hand that had stabbed Jenny Saphir, and tied the scarf round her neck.

‘And it is the print of a left hand,’ observed Lupin. ‘Hence my warning, which had nothing miraculous about it, you see. For, though I admit, friend of my youth, that you may look upon me as a superior intelligence, I won’t have you treat me as a wizard.’

Ganimard had quickly pocketed the piece of silk. Lupin nodded his head in approval:

‘Quite right, old boy, it’s for you. I’m so glad you’re glad! And, you see, there was no trap about all this . . . only the wish to oblige . . . a service between friends, between pals. . . . And also, I confess, a little curiosity. . . . Yes, I wanted to examine this other piece of silk, the one the police had. . . . Don’t be afraid. I’ll give it back to you. . . . Just a second. . . .’

Lupin, with a careless movement, played with the tassel

at the end of this half of the scarf, while Ganimard listened to him in spite of himself:

‘How ingenious these little bits of women’s work are! Did you notice one detail in the maid’s evidence? Jenny Saphir was very handy with her needle and used to make all her own hats and frocks. It is obvious that she made this scarf herself. . . . Besides, I noticed that from the first. I am naturally curious, as I have already told you, and I made a thorough examination of the piece of silk which you have just put in your pocket. Inside the tassel, I found a little sacred medal, which the poor girl had stitched into it to bring her luck. Touching, isn’t it, Ganimard? A little medal of Our Lady of Good Succour.’

The inspector felt greatly puzzled and did not take his eyes off the other. And Lupin continued:

‘Then I said to myself, “How interesting it would be to explore the other half of the scarf, the one which the police will find round the victim’s neck! For this other half, which I hold in my hands at last, is finished off in the same way . . . so I shall be able to see if it has a hiding-place too and what’s inside it. . . . But look, my friend, isn’t it cleverly made? And so simple! All you have to do is to take a skein of red cord and braid it round a wooden cup, leaving a recess, a little empty space in the middle, very small, of course, but large enough to hold a medal of a saint . . . or anything. . . . A precious stone, for instance. . . . Such as a sapphire. . . .”’

At that moment, he finished pushing back the silk cord, and, from the hollow of a cup, he took between his thumb and forefinger a wonderful blue stone, perfect in respect of size and purity.

‘Ha! What did I tell you, friend of my youth?’

He raised his head. The inspector had turned livid and was staring wild-eyed, as though fascinated by the stone that sparkled before him. He at last realized the whole plot:

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'You dirty scoundrel!' he muttered, repeating the insults which he had used at the first interview. 'You scum of the earth!'

The two men were standing one against the other:

'Give me that back,' said the inspector.

Lupin held out the piece of silk.

'And the sapphire,' said Ganimard, in a peremptory tone.

'Don't be silly.'

'Give it back, or . . .'

'Or what, you idiot?' cried Lupin. 'Look here, do you think I put you on to this soft thing for nothing?'

'Give it back!'

'You haven't noticed what I've been about, that's plain! What! For four weeks, I've kept you on the move like a deer; and you want to . . .! Come, Ganimard, old chap, pull yourself together! . . . Don't you see that you've been playing the good dog for four weeks on end? . . . Fetch it, Rover! . . . There's a nice blue pebble over there, which master can't get at. Hunt it, Ganimard, fetch it . . . bring it to master. . . . Ah, he's his master's own good little dog! . . . Sit up! Beg! . . . Does'ms want a bit of sugar then? . . .'

Ganimard, containing the anger that seethed within him, thought only of one thing, summoning his detectives. And, as the room in which he now was looked out on the courtyard, he tried gradually to work his way round to the communicating door. He would then run to the window and break one of the panes.

'All the same,' continued Lupin, 'what a pack of dunder-heads you and the rest must be! You've had the silk all this time and not one of you ever thought of feeling it, not one of you ever asked himself the reason why the poor girl hung on to her scarf. Not one of you! You just acted at haphazard, without reflecting, without foreseeing anything. . .'

The inspector had attained his object. Taking advantage of a second when Lupin had turned away from him, he

suddenly wheeled round and grasped the door-handle. But an oath escaped him: the handle did not budge.

Lupin burst into a fit of laughing:

‘Not even that! You did not even foresee that! You lay a trap for me and you won’t admit that I may perhaps smell the thing out beforehand. . . And you allow yourself to be brought into this room without asking whether I am not bringing you here for a particular reason and without remembering that the locks are fitted with a special mechanism. Come, now, speaking frankly, what do you think of yourself?’

‘What do I think of it?’ roared Ganimard, beside himself with rage.

He had drawn his revolver and was pointing it straight at Lupin’s face:

‘Hands up!’ he cried. ‘That’s what I think of it!’

Lupin placed himself in front of him and shrugged his shoulders:

‘Sold again!’ he said.

‘Hands up, I say, once more!’

‘And sold again, say I. Your deadly weapon won’t go off.’

‘What?’

‘Old Catherine, your housekeeper, is in my service. She damped the charges this morning, while you were having your breakfast coffee.’

Ganimard made a furious gesture, pocketed the revolver and rushed at Lupin.

‘Well?’ said Lupin, stopping him short with a well-aimed kick on the shin.

Their clothes were almost touching. They exchanged glances of two adversaries who mean to come to blows. Nevertheless, there was no fight. The recollection of the earlier struggles made any present struggle useless. And Ganimard, who remembered all his past failures, his vain attacks, Lupin’s crushing reprisals, did not lift a limb. There

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was nothing to be done. He felt it. Lupin had forces at his command against which any individual force simply broke to pieces. So what was the good?

‘I agree,’ said Lupin, in a friendly voice, as though answering Ganimard’s unspoken thought, ‘you would do better to let things be as they are. Besides, friend of my youth, think of all that this incident has brought you: fame, the certainty of quick promotion and, thanks to that, the prospect of a happy and comfortable old age! Surely, you don’t want the discovery of the sapphire and the head of poor Arsène Lupin in addition! It wouldn’t be fair. To say nothing of the fact that poor Arsène Lupin saved your life. . . . Yes sir! Who warned you, at this very spot, that Prevailles was left-handed? . . . And is this the way you thank me? It’s not pretty of you, Ganimard. Upon my word, you make me blush for you!’

While chattering, Lupin had gone through the same performance as Ganimard and was now near the door. Ganimard saw that his foe was about to escape him. Forgetting all prudence, he tried to block his way, and received a tremendous butt in the stomach, which sent him rolling to the opposite wall.

Lupin dexterously touched a spring, turned the handle, opened the door and slipped away, roaring with laughter as he went.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, when Ganimard at last succeeded in joining his men, one of them said to him:

‘A house-painter left the house, as his mates were coming back from breakfast, and put a letter in my hand. “Give that to your governor,” he said. “Which governor?” I asked, but he was gone. I suppose it’s meant for you.’

‘Let’s have it.’

Ganimard opened the letter. It was hurriedly scribbled in pencil and contained these words:

‘This is to warn you, friend of my youth, against excessive credulity. When a fellow tells you that the cartridges in your revolver are damp, however great your confidence in that fellow may be, even though his name be Arsène Lupin, never allow yourself to be taken in. Fire first; and, if the fellow hops the twig, you will have acquired the proof (1) that the cartridges are not damp; and (2) that old Catherine is the most honest and respectable of housekeepers.

‘One of these days, I hope to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance.

‘Meanwhile, friend of my youth, believe me

‘always affectionately and sincerely yours,

‘ARSÈNE LUPIN’

XII

The Secret of the 'Magnifique'

E. Phillips Oppenheim

The man was awaiting the service of his dinner in the magnificent buffet of the Gare de Lyons. He sat at a table laid for three, on the right-hand side of the entrance and close to the window. From below came the turmoil of the trains. Every few minutes the swing doors opened to admit little parties of travellers. The solitary occupant of the table scarcely ever moved his head. Yet he had always the air of one who watches.

In appearance he was both unremarkable and undistinguished. He was of somewhat less than medium height, of unathletic, almost frail physique. His head was thrust a little forward, as though he were afflicted with a chronic stoop. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles with the air of one who has taken to them too late in life to have escaped the constant habit of peering, which had given to his neck an almost stork-like appearance. His hair and thin moustache were iron-grey, his fingers long and delicate. The labels upon his luggage were addressed in a trim, scholarly hand:

MR JOHN T. LAXWORTHY,
Passenger to ———,
Via Paris.

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A maître d'hôtel, who was passing, paused and looked at the two as yet unoccupied places.

'Monsieur desires the service of his dinner?' he inquired.

Mr John T. Laxworthy glanced up at the clock and carefully compared the time with his own watch. He answered the man's inquiry in French which betrayed no sign of any accent.

'In five minutes,' he declared, 'my friends will have arrived. The service of dinner can then proceed.'

The man bowed and withdrew, a little impressed by his customer's trim precision of speech. Almost as he left the table, the swing doors opened once more to admit another traveller. The new-comer stood on the threshold for a moment, looking around him. He carried a much-labelled dressing-case in his hand, and an umbrella under his arm. He stood firmly upon his feet, and a more thoroughly British, self-satisfied, and obvious person had, to all appearance, never climbed those stairs. He wore a travelling-suit of dark grey, a check ulster, broad-toed boots, and a Homburg hat. His complexion was sandy, and his figure distinctly inclined towards corpulence. He wore scarcely noticeable side-whiskers, and his chin and upper lip were clean-shaven. His eyes were bright and his mouth had an upward and humorous turn. The initials upon his bag were W.F.A., and a printed label upon the same indicated his full name as:

MR W. FORREST ANDERSON,
Passenger to ———,
Via Paris.

His brief contemplation of the room was soon over. His eyes fell upon the solitary figure, now deep in a book, seated at the table on his right. He set down his dressing-case by the side of the wall, yielded his coat and hat to the attendant vestiaire, and, with the pleased smile of one who

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greeted an old friend approached the table at which Mr John T. Laxworthy sat waiting.

The idiosyncrasies of great men are always worth noting, and Mr John T. Laxworthy was, without a doubt, foredoomed from the cradle to a certain measure of celebrity. His method of receiving the new-comer was in some respects curious. From the moment when the swing doors had been pushed open and the portly figure of Mr Forrest Anderson had crossed the threshold, his eyes had not once quitted the heavy-looking volume, the contents of which appeared so completely to absorb his attention. Even now, when his friend stood by his side, he did not at once look up. Slowly, and with his eyes still riveted upon the pages he was studying, he held out his left hand.

'I am glad to see you, Anderson,' he said, 'Sit down by my side here. You are nearly ten minutes late. I have delayed ordering the wine until your arrival. Shall it be white or red?'

Mr Anderson shook with much heartiness the limp fingers which had been offered to him, and took the seat indicated. His friend's eccentricity of manner appeared to be familiar to him, and he offered no comment upon it.

'White, if you please—Chablis of a dry brand, for choice. Sorry if I'm late. Beastly crossing, beastly crowded train. Glad to be here, anyhow.'

Mr John T. Laxworthy closed his book with a little sigh of regret, and placed a marker within it. He then carefully adjusted his spectacles and made a deliberate survey of his companion. Finally he nodded, slowly and approvingly.

'How about the partridges?' he inquired.

'Bad,' Mr Anderson declared, with a sigh. 'It was one storm in June that did it. We went light last season, though, and I'm putting down forty brace of Hungarians. You see
____,'

Mr Laxworthy touched the table with his forefinger, and his companion almost automatically stopped.

‘Quite excellent,’ the former pronounced dryly. ‘Don’t overdo it. I should think that this must be Sydney.’

Mr Anderson glanced towards the entrance. Then he looked back at his companion a little curiously. Mr Laxworthy had not raised his head.

‘How the dickens did you know that it was Sydney?’ he demanded.

Mr Laxworthy smiled at the tablecloth.

‘I have a special sense for that sort of thing,’ he remarked. ‘I like to use my eyes as seldom as possible.’

A young man who had just completed a leisurely survey of the room dropped his monocle and came towards them. From the tips of his shiny tan shoes to his smoothly brushed hair, he was unmistakable. He was young, he was English, he was well-bred, he was an athlete. He had a pleasant, unintelligent face, a natural and prepossessing ease of manner. He handed his ulster to the attendant vestiaire and beamed upon the two men.

‘How are you, Forrest? How do you do, Laxworthy?’ he exclaimed. ‘Looking jolly fit, both of you.’

Mr Laxworthy raised his glass. He looked thoughtfully at the wine for a moment, to be sure that it was free from any atom of cork. Then he inclined his head in turn to each of his companions.

‘I am glad to see you both,’ he said. ‘On the whole, I think that I may congratulate you. You have done well. I drink to our success.’

The toast was drunk in silence. Mr Forrest Anderson set down his glass—empty—with a little murmur of content.

‘It is something,’ he remarked, vigorously attacking a new course, ‘to have satisfied our chief.’

The young man opposite to him subjected the dish which

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was being offered to a long and deliberate survey through his eyeglass, and finally refused it.

'Give me everything in France except the beef,' he declared. 'Must be the way they cut it, I think. Quite right, Andy,' he went on, glancing across the table. 'To have satisfied such a critic as the chief here is an achievement indeed. Having done it, let us hear what he proposes to do with us.'

'In other words,' Mr Anderson put in, 'what is the game to be?'

There was a short pause. Mr John T. Laxworthy was continuing his repast—which was, by the by, of a much more frugal character than that offered to his guests—without any sign of having even heard the inquiry addressed to him by his companions. They knew him, however, and they were content to wait. Presently he commenced to peel an apple and simultaneously to unburden himself.

'A great portion of this last year,' he said, 'which you two have spent apparently with profit in carrying out my instructions, I myself have devoted to the perfection of a certain scholarly tone which I feel convinced is my proper environment. Incidentally, I have devoted myself to the study of various schools of philosophy.'

'I will take a liqueur,' decided the young man, whose name was Sydney—'something brain-stimulating. A Grand Marnier, waiter, if you please.'

'The same for me,' Mr Forrest Anderson put in hastily. 'Also, in a few moments, some black coffee.'

Mr Laxworthy did not by the flicker of an eyelid betray the slightest annoyance at these interruptions. He waited, indeed, until the liqueurs had been brought before he spoke again, continuing the while in a leisurely fashion the peeling and preparing of his apple. Even for some time after his friends had again offered him their undivided attention, he continued his task of extracting from it, with precise care, every fragment of core.

'In one very interesting treatise,' he recommenced at last, 'I found several obvious truths ingeniously put. A certain decadence in the material prosperity of an imaginary state is clearly proved to be due to a too blind following of the tenets of what is known as the hysterical morality, as against the decrees of what we might call expediency. A little sentiment, like garlic in cookery, is a good thing; too much is fatal. A little—sufficient—morality is excellent; a superabundance disastrous. Society is divided into two classes, those who have and those who desire to have. The one must always prey upon the other. They are, therefore, always changing places. It is this continued movement which lends energy to the human race. As soon as it is suspended, degeneration must follow as a matter of course. It is for those who recognize this great truth to follow and obey its tenets.'

'May we not hear more definitely what it is that you propose?' Anderson asked, a little anxiously.

'We stand,' Mr Laxworthy replied, 'always upon the threshold of the land of adventure. At no place are we nearer to it than in this room. It is our duty to use our energies to assist in the great principles of movement to which I have referred. We must take our part in the struggle. On which side? you naturally ask. Are we to be amongst those who have, and who, through weakness or desire, must yield to others? or shall we take our place amongst the more intellectual, the more highly gifted minority, those who assist the progress of the world by helping towards the redistribution of its wealth? Sydney, how much money have you?'

'Three hundred and ninety-five francs and a few coppers,' the young man answered promptly. 'It sounds more in French.'

'And you, Anderson?'

Mr Forrest Anderson coughed.

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'With the exception of a five-franc piece,' he admitted, 'I am worth exactly as much as I shall be able to borrow from you presently.'

'In that case,' Mr Laxworthy said dryly, 'our position is preordained. We take our place amongst the aggressors.'

The young man whose name was Sydney dropped his eyeglass.

'One moment,' he said. 'Andy here and I have exposed our financial impecuniosity at your request. It can scarcely be a surprise to you, considering that we have practically lived upon your bounty for the last year. It seems only fair that you should imitate our candour. There were rumours, a short time ago, of a considerable sum of money to which you had become entitled. To tell you the truth,' the young man went on, leaning a little across the table, 'we were almost afraid, or rather I was, that you might abandon this shadowy enterprise of ours.'

Mr John T. Laxworthy, without being discomposed, which was almost too much to expect of a man with such perfect poise, seemed nevertheless somewhat taken aback. He opened his lips as though to make some reply, and closed them again. When he did speak, it was grudgingly.

'No successful enterprise, or series of enterprises, can be conducted without capital,' he said. 'I am free to admit that I am in possession of a certain amount of that indispensable commodity. I do not feel myself called upon to state the exact amount, but such money as is required for our journeyings, or for any enterprise in which we become engaged will be forthcoming.'

Mr Anderson stroked his chin meditatively.

'I am sure,' he said, 'that that sounds quite satisfactory.'

'I call it jolly fine business,' the young man declared. 'There is just one thing more upon which I think we ought to have an understanding. You say that we are to take our

place amongst the aggressors. Exactly what does that mean?’

Mr Laxworthy looked at him coldly.

‘It means precisely what I choose that it shall mean,’ he replied. ‘Any enterprise or adventure in which we may become engaged will be selected by me, and by me only. My chief aim—I have no objection to telling you this—is to make life tolerable for ourselves, to escape the dull monotony of idleness, and, incidentally, to embrace any opportunity which may present itself to enrich our exchequer. Have you any objection to that?’

‘None,’ Mr Forrest Anderson declared.

‘None at all,’ Sydney echoed.

‘There are three of us,’ Mr Laxworthy went on. ‘We each have our use. Mine is the chief of all. I supply the brains. My position must be unquestioned.’

‘For my part, I am willing enough,’ Sydney remarked. ‘It’s been your show from the first.’

Mr Forrest Anderson, who had dined well and forgotten his empty pockets, laughed a genial laugh.

‘I agree,’ he declared. ‘Tell us, when and where do we start, and shall our first enterprise be Pickwickian, or am I to play the Sancho Panza to your Don Quixote and Sydney’s donkey?’

Mr Laxworthy regarded his associates coldly. There was a silence, a silence which became somehow an ominous thing. Around them reigned a babel of tongues, a clatter of crockery. Below, the turmoil of the busy station, the shrieking of departing trains. But at the table presided over by Mr Laxworthy no word was spoken. Mr Anderson’s geniality faded away. His young companion’s amiable nonchalance entirely deserted him. Either of them would have given worlds to have been able to dispel the strange effect of this silence with some casual remark. But upon them lay the spell of the

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conqueror. The little man at the head of the table held them in the hollow of his hand.

'It may be,' he said, breaking at last that curious silence, 'that no other occasion will ever arise when it will be necessary to speak to you in this fashion. So now listen. You are right to indulge in the urbanities of existence. Keep always the smile upon your lips, if you can, but underneath let the real consciousness of life be ever present. I do not claim for myself the genius of a Pickwick or the valour of a Don Quixote. On the other hand, we are not paltry aggressors against Society, failing in one enterprise, successful in the next, a mark for ridicule and contempt one moment, and for good-humoured sufferance the next. I do not ask you to embark with me as farceurs upon a series of enterprises carried out upon the principle of "Let us do our best and chance the rest." It is just possible that the fates may be against us, and that we may live together for many months the lives of ordinary and moderately commonplace human beings. I ask you to remember that no sense of danger would ever deter me from embarking upon any adventure which I deemed likely to afford us either diversion, wealth, or satisfaction of any sort whatsoever. We are not pleasure-seekers. We are men whose one end and aim is to escape from the chains of everyday existence, to avoid the humdrum life of our fellows. Therein may lie for us many and peculiar dangers. Adopt, if you will, the motto of the pagans—"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" So long as you remember. Will you drink with me to that remembrance?'

Mr Laxworthy, as he grew less enigmatic in his speech, became, if possible, more whimsical in his mannerisms. He ordered the best Cognac, at which he himself scarcely glanced, and turned with a little sigh of relief to his book. In the midst of this hubbub of sounds and bustle of diners he continued to read with every appearance of studious

enjoyment. His two companions were content enough, apparently, to relax after their journey and enjoy their cigars. Nevertheless, they once or twice glanced curiously at their chief. One of these glances he seemed, although he never raised his head, to have intercepted, for, carefully marking the place in his book, he pushed it away and addressed them.

‘Our plans,’ he announced abruptly, ‘are not yet wholly made. We wait here for—shall we call it an inspiration? Perhaps, even at this moment, it is not far from us.’

Mr Forrest Anderson and his vis-à-vis turned as though instinctively towards the door. At that moment two men who had just passed through were standing upon the threshold. One was rather past middle-age, corpulent, with red features of a coarse type. His companion, who was leaning upon his arm, was much younger, and a very different sort of person. He was tall and exceedingly thin. His features were wasted almost to emaciation, his complexion was ghastly. He seemed to have barely strength enough to move.

‘They are coming to the table next us,’ Laxworthy said, in a very low tone. ‘The address upon their luggage will be interesting.’

Slowly the two men came down the room. As Laxworthy had expected, they took possession of an empty table close at hand. The young man sank into his chair with a little sigh of exhaustion.

‘A liqueur brandy, quick,’ the older man ordered, as he accepted the menu from a waiter. ‘My friend is fatigued.’

Sydney took the bottle which stood upon their own table poured out a wineglassful, and, rising to his feet, stepped across and accosted the young man.

‘Do me the favour of drinking this, sir,’ he begged. ‘The service here is slow and the brandy excellent. I can see that you are in need of it. It may serve, too, as an aperitif.’

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The young man accepted it with a smile of gratitude. His companion echoed his thanks.

'Very much obliged to you, sir,' he declared. 'My friend here is a little run down and finds travelling fatiguing.'

'A passing malady, I trust?' Sydney remarked, preparing to return to his seat.

'A legacy from that cursed graveyard—South Africa,' the older man growled.

Sydney stepped back and resumed his seat. In a few minutes he leaned across the table.

'The Paradise Hotel, Hyères,' he said under his breath.

Mr Laxworthy looked thoughtful.

'You surprise me,' he admitted.

'What do you know of them?' Anderson inquired.

Mr Laxworthy shrugged his shoulders.

'Not much beyond the obvious facts,' he admitted. 'Even you, my friends, are not wholly deceived, I presume, by the young man's appearance?'

They evidently were. Their faces expressed their non-comprehension.

Mr Laxworthy sighed.

'You must both of you seek to develop the minor senses,' he enjoined reprovingly. 'Your powers of observation, for instance, are, without doubt, exceedingly stunted. Let me assure you, for example, that your sympathy for that young man is entirely wasted.'

'You mean that he is not really ill?' Sydney asked incredulously.

'Most certainly he is not as ill as he pretends,' Mr Laxworthy declared dryly. 'If you look at him more closely you will discover a certain theatricality in his pose which of itself should undeceive you.'

'You know who he is?' Sydney asked.

'I believe so,' Laxworthy admitted. 'I can hazard a guess even to his companion's identity. But—the Paradise Hotel,

Hyères! Order some fresh coffee. We are not ready to leave yet. Anderson, watch the door. Sydney, don't let them notice it, but watch our friends there. Something may happen.'

A tall, broad-shouldered man with a fair moustache and wearing a long travelling-coat had entered the buffet. He stood there for a moment looking around, as though in search of a table. The majority of those present suffered his scrutiny, unnoticing, indifferent, naturally absorbed in themselves and their own affairs. Not so these two men who had last entered. Every nerve of the young man's body seemed to have become tense. His hand had stolen into the pocket of his travelling-coat, and with a little thrill Sydney saw the glitter of steel half shown for a moment between his interlocked fingers. No longer was this young man's countenance the countenance of an invalid. It had become instead like the face of a wolf. His front teeth were showing—he had moved slightly so as to give his arm full play. It seemed as though a tragedy were at hand.

The man who had been standing on the threshold deposited his handbag upon the floor near the wall, and came down the room. Laxworthy and his two associates watched. Their two neighbours at the next table sat in well simulated indifference, only once more Sydney saw the gleam of hidden steel flash for a moment from the depths of that ulster pocket. The new-comer made no secret of his destination. He advanced straight to their table and came to a standstill immediately in front of them. Both the stout man and his invalid companion looked up at him as one might regard a stranger.

To all appearance Laxworthy was engrossed in his book. Sydney and Anderson watched and listened, but of all the words which passed between those three men, not one was audible. No change of countenance on the part of any one of the three indicated even the nature of that swift and fluent

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interchange of words. Only at the last, the elder man touched the label attached to his dressing-bag, and they heard his words:

'The Paradise Hotel, Hyères. We shall be there for at least a month.'

The new-comer stood perfectly still for several moments, as though deliberating. The young man's hand came an inch or two from his pocket. Chance and tragedy trifled together in the midst of that crowded room, unnoticed save by those three at the adjoining table. Then, as though inspired with a sudden resolution, this stranger, whose coming had seemed so unwelcome, raised his hat slightly to the two men with whom he had been talking, and turned away.

'The Paradise Hotel at Hyères,' he repeated. 'I shall know, then, where to find you.'

The little scene was over. Nothing had happened. Nevertheless, the fingers of the young man, as his hand emerged from his pocket, were moist and damp, and his appearance was now veritably ghastly. His companion watched, with a deep purple flush upon his face, the passing of this stranger who had accosted him. He had the appearance of one threatened with apoplexy.

'One might be interested to know the meaning of these things,' Sydney murmured softly.

Their chief looked up from his book.

'Then one must follow—to the Paradise Hotel,' he remarked.

'I begin to believe,' Anderson declared, 'that it is our destination.'

'There is no hurry,' Laxworthy replied. 'Grimes once told me that this room in which we are now sitting was perhaps the most interesting rendezvous in Europe. Grimes was at the head of the Foreign Department at Scotland Yard in those days, and he knew what he was talking about.'

A woman, wrapped in magnificent furs, who was passing their table, was run into by a clumsy waiter and dropped a satchel from her finger. Sydney hastened to restore it to her, and was rewarded by a gracious smile in which was mingled a certain amount of recognition.

'You seem fated to be my Good Samaritan to-day,' she remarked.

'It is my good fortune,' the young man replied. 'Can I help you to get a table or anything? This place is always overcrowded.'

She motioned with her head to where a maître d'hôtel was holding a chair for her.

'It is already arranged,' she said. 'Perhaps we shall meet in the Luxe afterwards, if you are going south.'

'You are travelling far?' Sydney ventured to inquire.

'Only to the outskirts of the Riviera,' she answered. 'I am going to Hyères—to the Paradise Hotel. Why do you smile?'

'My friends and I,' he explained, 'have met here to decide upon the whereabouts of a little holiday we mean to spend together. We were at that moment discussing a suggestion to proceed to the same place.'

She gave him a little farewell nod as she passed on.

'If you decide to do so,' she declared, 'it will give me great pleasure to meet you again.'

'I congratulate you,' Laxworthy remarked dryly, as Sydney resumed his seat. 'A most interesting acquaintance, yours.'

'Do you know who she is?' the young man asked. 'I only met her on the train.'

His chief nodded gravely.

'She is Madame Bertrand,' he replied. 'Her husband at one time held a post in the Foreign Office, under Fauré. For some reason or other he was discredited, and since then he has died. There was some scandal about Madame Bertrand

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herself, and some papers which were missing from her husband's portfolio, but nothing definite ever came to light.'

'Madame seems to survive the loss of her husband,' Mr Forrest Anderson remarked, looking across at her admiringly.

Laxworthy held up his hand. Almost for the first time he was sitting upright in his chair, his head still thrust forward in his usual attitude, his eyes fixed upon the door. The thin fingers of his right hand were spread flat upon the tablecloth.

'We have finished, for the moment, with the Madame Bertrands of the world,' he announced. 'After all, they are for the pigmies. Here comes food for giants.'

The light of battle was in Laxworthy's eyes. The greatest of men have their moments of weakness, and even Laxworthy, for that brief space of time, forgot himself and his pose toward the world. His thin lips were a little parted, the veins at the sides of his forehead stood out like blue cords. His lips moved slowly.

'You can both look,' he said. 'They are probably used to it. You will see the two greatest personages on earth.'

His companions gazed eagerly toward the door. Two men were standing there, being relieved of their wraps and directed toward a table. One was middle-aged, grey-headed, with a somewhat worn but keen face. The other was taller, with black hair streaked with grey, a face half Jewish, half romantic, a skin like ivory.

'The greatest men in the world?' Sydney repeated, under his breath. 'You are joking, chief. I never saw even a photograph of either of them before in my life.'

'The one nearest you,' Laxworthy announced, 'is Mr Freeling Poignton. The newspapers will tell you that his fortune exceeds the national debt of any country in the world. He is, without doubt, the richest man who was ever born. There has never yet breathed an emperor whose up-

raised finger could provoke or stop a war, whose careless word could check the prosperity of the proudest nation that ever breathed. These things Mr Freeling Poignton can do.'

'And the other?' Anderson whispered.

'It is chance,' Mr Laxworthy said softly, 'which placed a sceptre of unlimited power in the hands of Richard Freeling Poignton. It is his own genius which has made the Marquis Lefant the greatest power in the diplomatic world. It was his decision which brought about war between Russia and Japan. It was he who stopped the declaration of war against Germany by our own Prime Minister at the time of the Algeciras difficulty. It was he who offered a million pounds to bring the Tsar of Russia to Germany—and he did it. There is little that he cannot do '

'Is he a German?' Anderson asked.

'No one knows of what race he comes,' Mr Laxworthy replied. 'No one knows what country is really nearest to his heart. It is his custom to accept commissions or refuse them, according to his own belief as to their influence upon international peace. They say that he has English blood in his veins. If so, he has been a sorry friend to his native land.'

'We seem,' Sydney remarked, 'to have chosen a very fortunate evening for our little dinner here. The place is full of interesting people. I wonder where those two are going.'

A maître d'hôtel, whose respect had been gained by the lavish orders from their table, paused and whispered confidentially in Mr Laxworthy's ear.

'The gentleman down there, sir,' he announced, 'The grey gentleman with his own servant waiting upon him, is Mr Freeling Poignton, the great American multi-millionaire.'

Laxworthy nodded slowly.

'I thought I recognized him by his photographs,' he said. 'Is he going to Monte Carlo?'

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The attendant shook his head.

'I was speaking to them a moment ago, sir,' he declared. 'Mr Poynton has been here a good many times. He and his friend are going for a fortnight's quiet to the Paradise Hotel at Hyères.'

The maître d'hôtel passed on with another bow. The three men looked at one another. Mr Laxworthy glanced at the clock.

'Sydney,' he said, 'will you step down into the bureau and find out whether it is possible to get three seats in the train de luxe?'

'For Hyères?' Sydney asked.

Mr Laxworthy assented gravely.

'Certainly,' he said. 'You might at the same time telegraph to the hotel.'

'To the Paradise Hotel?'

Mr Laxworthy inclined his head.

A black cloud, long and with jagged edges, passed away from the face of the moon. The plain of Hyères was gradually revealed—the cypress trees, tall and straight, the shimmering olive trees with their ghostly foliage, the fields of violets, the level vineyards. And beyond, the phalanx of lights on the warships lying in the bay. The hotel on the hill-side, freshly painted and spotlessly white, stood sharply out against the dark background. The whole world was becoming visible.

Upon the balcony of one of the rooms upon the second floor a man was standing with his back to the wall. He looked around at the flooding moonlight and swore softly to himself. Decidedly, things were turning out ill with him. From the adjoining balcony a thin rope was hanging, swaying very slightly in the night breeze. The young man gazed helplessly at the end, which had slipped from his fingers, and which was hanging just now over some flower-

beds. He was face to face with the almost insoluble problem of how to regain the shelter of his own room.

From the gardens below came the melancholy cry of a passing owl. From the white, barnlike farmhouse, perched on the mountain-side in the distance, came the bark of a dog. Then again there was silence. The man looked back into the room from which he had escaped, and down at the end of that swinging rope. He was indeed on the horns of a dilemma. To return into the room was insanity. To stay where he was was to risk being seen by the earliest passer-by or the first person who chanced to look out from a window. To try to pass to his own veranda without the aid of that rope which he had lost was an impossibility.

It was already five minutes since he had crept out from the room and had let the rope slip from his fingers. The owl had finished his mournful serenade, the watch-dog on the mountain-side slept. The deep silence of the hours before dawn brooded over the land. The man, fiercely impatient though he was to escape, was constrained to wait. There seemed to be nothing which he could do.

Then again the silence of the night was strangely, almost harshly broken, this time from the interior of the hotel. An alarm bell, harsh and discordant, rang out a brazen note of terror. Lights suddenly flashed in the windows, footsteps hurried along the corridor. The man outside upon the balcony set his teeth and cursed. Detection now seemed unavoidable.

The room behind him was speedily invaded. Madame Bertrand, in a dressing-gown whose transparent simplicity had been the triumph of a celebrated establishment in the Rue de la Paix, her beautiful hair tied up only with pink ribbon, her eyes kindling with excitement, received a stream of agitated callers. The floor waiter, three guests in various states of *déshabille*, and finally the manager, breathless with haste, all claimed her attention at the same time.

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'It was I who rang the danger-bell,' madame declared indignantly. 'In an hotel where such things are possible, it is well, indeed, that one should be able to sound the alarm. There has been a man in my rooms.'

'But it is unheard of, madame!' the manager replied.

'It is nevertheless true,' madame insisted. 'Not two minutes since, I opened my eyes and he disappeared into my sitting-room. I saw him distinctly. I could not recognize him, for he kept his face turned away. Either he has escaped through the sitting-room door and down the corridor, or he is still there, or he is hiding in this room.'

'The jewels of madame!' the manager gasped. 'I tremble in every limb. How can I know whether or not I have been robbed?'

'The pearls of madame,' he persisted—'the string of pearls?'

'That is safe,' madame admitted. 'My diamond collar, too, is in its place.'

The manager and two of the guests searched the sitting-room, which opened to the left from the bedroom. Others spread themselves over the hotel to calm fears of the startled guests, and to assure everybody that there was no fire and that nothing particular had happened. The search was, of necessity, not a long one; there was no one in the sitting-room. The manager and his helpers returned.

'The room is empty, madame,' the former declared.

'Then the burglar has escaped!' she cried.

Monsieur Helder went down on his knees and peered in vain under the bed.

'Madame is sure,' he inquired, raising his head with some temerity but remaining upon his knees—'madame is absolutely convinced that it was not an illusion—the fragment of a dream, perhaps? It is strange that there should have been time for anyone to have escaped.'

'A dream, indeed!' madame declared indignantly. 'I do not dream such things, Monsieur Helder.'

Monsieur Helder dived again under the valance. It was just at that moment that Madame Bertrand, gazing into the plate-glass mirror of the wardrobe, received a shock. Distinctly she saw a man's face reflected there. With the predominant instinct of her sex aroused, she opened her lips to scream—and just as suddenly closed them again. She stood for a moment quite still, her hand pressed to her side. Then she turned her head and looked out of the French windows which led on to the balcony. There was nothing to be seen. She looked across at Monsieur Helder, whose head had disappeared inside the wardrobe. Then she stole up to the window and glanced once more on to the balcony.

'Madame,' Monsieur Helder declared, 'the room is empty. Your sitting-room also is empty. There remains,' he added, with a sudden thought, 'only the balcony.'

He advanced a step. Madame Bertrand, however, remained motionless. She was standing in front of the window.

'The balcony I have examined myself,' she said quietly. 'There is no one there. Besides, I am not one of the English cranks who sleep always with the damp night air filling their rooms. My windows are bolted.'

'In that case, madame,' Monsieur Helder declared, with a little shrug of the shoulders, 'we must conclude that the intruder escaped through your sitting-room door into the corridor. Madame can at least assure me that nothing of great value is missing from her belongings?'

Madame Bertrand, though pale, was graciously pleased to reassure the inquirer.

'You have reason, my friend,' she admitted. 'Nothing of great value is missing. The shock, however, I shall not get over for days. After this, Monsieur Helder, you will not banish my maid again to that horrible annexe. Whoever

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occupies the next room to mine here must give it up. Not another night will I sleep here alone and unprotected.'

Monsieur Helder bowed.

'Madame,' he said, 'the adjoining room is occupied by Mr Sydney Wing, an Englishman, whom madame will perhaps recollect. He is, I am sure, a man of gallantry. After the adventure of tonight he will doubtless offer to vacate his room for the convenience of madame's maid.'

'It must be arranged,' madame insisted.

Monsieur Helder backed toward the door.

'If madame would like her maid for the rest of the night—' he suggested.

Madame Bertrand shook her head.

'Not now,' she replied. 'I will not have the poor girl disturbed. After what has passed, she would lie here in terror. As for me, I shall lock all my doors, and perhaps, after all, I shall sleep.'

Monsieur Helder drew himself up upon the threshold. He was not a very imposing-looking object in his trousers and a crumpled shirt, but he permitted himself a bow.

'Madame,' he said, 'will accept this expression of my infinite regret that her slumbers should have been so disturbed.'

'I thank you very much, Monsieur Helder,' she answered graciously. 'Good night!'

Monsieur Helder executed his bow and disappeared. Madame paused for a moment to listen to his footsteps down the corridor. Then she moved forward to the door and locked it. For a few seconds longer she hesitated. Then she walked deliberately to the French windows, threw them open, and stepped on to the balcony.

'Good evening, Monsieur Sydney Wing—or rather good morning!'

The young man gripped for a moment the frail balus-

trade. It must be confessed that he had lost entirely his *savoir-faire*.

‘Madame!’ he faltered.

She pointed to the open doors.

‘Inside!’ she whispered imperatively—‘inside at once!’

She pointed to the swinging cord. The young man stepped only too willingly inside the room. She followed him and closed the windows.

‘You will gather, Monsieur Sydney Wing,’ she said, ‘that I am disposed to spare you. I knew that you were outside, even while my room was being searched. I preferred first to hear your explanation, before I gave you up to be treated as a common burglar.’

The young man’s courage was returning fast. He lifted his head. His eyes were full of gratitude—or what, at any rate, gleamed like gratitude.

‘Oh, madame,’ he murmured, ‘you are too gracious!’

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. She looked at him not unkindly.

‘You will come this way,’ she said, leading him into the sitting-room and turning on the electric light. ‘Now, tell me, monsieur, and tell me the truth if you would leave this room a free man and without scandal. When I saw you first you were bending over that table. Upon it was my necklace, my earrings, a lace scarf, my chatelaine and vanity box, a few of my rings, perhaps a jewelled pin or two. Now tell me exactly what you came for, what you have taken, and why?’

The young man held himself upright. He drew a little breath. Fate was certainly dealing leniently with him.

‘Madame,’ he said, ‘think. Was there nothing else upon that table?’

She shook her head.

‘I can think of nothing,’ she acknowledged.

‘To-night,’ he continued, ‘you were scarcely so kind to

me. We danced together, it is true, but there were many others. There was the Admiral—the French Admiral, for instance. Madame was favourably disposed towards him.'

She was a coquette, and she shrugged her shoulders as she smiled.

'Why not? Admiral Christodor is a very charming man. He dances well, he entertains upon his wonderful battleship most lavishly, he is a very desirable and delightful acquaintance. And you, Monsieur Sydney Wing, what have you to say that I should not dance and be friendly with this gentleman?'

The young man was feeling his feet upon the ground. Nevertheless, he continued to look serious.

'Alas!' he said, 'I have no right to find fault. Yet two nights ago madame gave me the rose I asked for. To-night—you remember?'

She looked at him softly yet steadily. Then she glanced at the table and back again into his face.

'You told me,' he continued, 'that the rose belonged to him who dared to pluck it.'

'It is a saying,' she murmured. 'I was not in earnest.'

Mr Sydney Wing sighed deeply.

'Madame,' he declared, 'I come of a literal nation. When we love, the word of a woman means much to us. To-night there seemed nothing dearer to me in life than the possession of that rose. I told myself that your challenge was accepted. I told myself that to-night I would sleep with that rose on the pillow by my side.'

Slowly he unbuttoned his coat. From the breast pocket he drew out a handkerchief and unfolded it. In the centre, crushed, and devoid of many of its petals, but still retaining its shape and perfume, lay a dark red rose.

Madame Bertrand moved a step towards him.

'Monsieur,' she cried incredulously, yet with some tenderness in her tone—'monsieur, you mean to tell me that

for the sake of that rose you climbed from your balcony to mine, you ran these risks?’

‘For the sake of this rose, madame, and all that it means to me,’ he answered.

She drew a long sigh. Then she held out her hand. Again he raised it to his lips.

‘Monsieur Sydney,’ she said, ‘I have done your countrymen an injustice all my life. I had not thought such sentiment was possible in any one of them. I am very glad indeed that when I saw your face reflected in the mirror of my wardrobe, something urged me to send Monsieur Helder away. I am very glad.’

‘Madame.’

She held up her finger. Already the faint beginning of dawn was stealing into the sky. From the farmhouse away on the hill-side a cock commenced to crow.

‘Monsieur,’ she whispered, ‘not another word. I have risked my reputation to save you. See, the door is before you. Unlock it softly. Be sure there is no one in the corridor when you leave. Do not attempt to close it. I myself in a few minutes’ time will return and do that.’

‘But Madame—’ he begged.

She pointed imploringly towards the door, but there was tenderness in her farewell glance.

‘Tomorrow we will talk,’ she promised. ‘Tomorrow night, if you should fancy my roses, perhaps I may be more kind. Good night!’

She stole back to her room and sat on the edge of her bed. Very noiselessly the young man opened the door of the sitting-room, glanced up and down, and with swift, silent footsteps made his way to his own apartment. Madame, some few minutes later, closed the door behind him, slowly slipped off her dressing-gown, and curled herself once more in her bed. Mr Sydney Wing, in the adjoining room, lit a cigarette and mixed himself a whisky-and-soda. There were

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drops of perspiration still upon his forehead as he stepped out on to the balcony and wound up his rope.

It was the most cheerful hour of the day at the Paradise Hotel—the hour before luncheon. A swarthy Italian was singing love-songs on the gravel sweep to the music of a guitar. The very air was filled with sunshine. A soft south wind was laden with perfumes from the violet farm below. Everyone seemed to be out of doors, promenading, or sitting about in little groups. Mr Laxworthy and Mr Forrest Anderson had just passed along the front and were threading their way up the winding path which led through the pine woods at the back of the hotel. Mr Lenfield, the invalid young man, was lying in a sheltered corner, taking a sun-bath; his companion by his side smoking a large cigar and occasionally reading extracts from a newspaper. The pretty American girl, who was one of the features of the place, and Madame Bertrand, were missing, the former because she was playing golf with Sydney Wing, the latter because she never rose until luncheon-time. Mr Freeling Poignton and the Marquis Lefant were sitting a little way up amongst the pine trees. Mr Freeling Poignton was smoking his morning cigar. Lefant was leaning forward, his eyes fixed steadily upon that streak of blue Mediterranean. In his hand he held his watch.

'I am quite sure,' he said softly, 'that I can rely upon my information. At a quarter past twelve precisely the torpedo is to be fired.'

'Which is the *Magnifique*, anyway?' Mr Freeling Poignton inquired.

Lefant pointed to the largest of the grey battleships which were riding at anchor. Then his fingers slowly traversed the blue space until it paused at a black object, like a derelict barge, set out very near the island of Hyères. He glanced at his watch.

'A quarter past,' he muttered. 'Look! My God!'

The black object had disappeared. A column of white water rose gracefully into the air and descended. It was finished. Lefant leaned towards his companion.

'You and I,' he said, 'have seen a thing which is going to change the naval history of the future. You and I alone can understand why the French Admiralty have given up building battleships, why even their target practice here and at Cherbourg continues as a matter of form only.'

Mr Freeling Poignton withdrew his cigar from his mouth.

'I can't say,' he admitted, 'that I have ever given any particular attention to these implements of warfare, because I hate them all; but there's nothing new, anyway, in a torpedo. What's the difference between this one and the ordinary sort?'

'I will tell you in a very few words,' Lefant answered. 'This one can be fired at a range of five miles, and relied upon to hit a mark little larger than the plate of a battleship with absolutely scientific accuracy. There is no question of aim at all. Just as you work out an exact spot in a surveying expedition by scientific instruments, so you can decide precisely the spot which that torpedo shall hit. It travels at the pace of ten miles a minute, and it has a charge which has never been equalled.'

Mr Freeling Poignton shivered a little, as he dropped the ash of his cigar.

'I'd like to electrocute the man who invented it,' he declared tersely.

Lefant shook his head.

'You are wrong,' he replied. 'The man who invented that torpedo is the friend of your scheme and not the enemy. Listen. It is your desire—is it not—the great ambition of your life, to secure for the world universal peace?'

Mr Freeling Poignton thrust his hands into his trousers pockets.

'Marquis,' he said, 'there is no man breathing who could say how much I am worth. Capitalize my present income, and you might call it five hundred million pounds. Put a quarter of a million somewhere in the bank for me, and I'll give the rest to see every army in Europe disbanded, every warship turned into a trading vessel, and every soldier and sailor turned into the factories or upon the land to become honest, productive units.'

'Just so,' Lefant assented. 'It may sound a little Utopian but it is magnificent. Now listen. You will never induce the rulers of the world to look upon this question reasonably, because every nation is jealous of some other, and no one is great enough to take the lead. The surest of all ways to prevent war is to reduce the art of killing to such a certainty that it becomes an absurdity even to take the field. What nation will build battleships which can be destroyed with the touch of a finger at any time, from practically any distance? I tell you that this invention, which only one or two people in the world outside of that battleship yonder know of at present, is the beginning of the end of all naval warfare. There is only one thing to be done—to drive this home. No nation must be allowed to keep the secret for her own. It must belong to all.'

Mr Freeing Poignton nodded thoughtfully.

'I begin to understand,' he remarked. 'Guess that's where you come in, isn't it?'

'I hope so,' Lefant assented. 'I have already spent a hundred thousand dollars of your money, but I think I have had value for it.'

'Say, why don't you treat this matter as we should on the other side?' Mr Freeing Poignton demanded. 'It's all very well to bribe these petty officers and such-like, but the admiral's your man. Remember that the money-bags of the world are behind you.'

Lefant smiled faintly.

‘Alas!’ he exclaimed, ‘the admiral belongs to a race little known in the world of commerce. Money-bags which reached to the sky would never buy him. There are others on the ship who are mine, and with the information I have the rest should be possible.’

Mr Freeling Poignton frowned. He disliked very much to hear of a man who denied the omnipotence of money. He felt like the king of some foreign country to whom a stranger had refused obeisance.

‘Well, you’ve got to run this thing,’ he remarked, ‘and I suppose you know what kind of lunatics you’ve got to deal with. Seems to me the most difficult job is for you to get on the battleship at all without the admiral’s consent.’

Lefant kicked a pebble away from beneath his feet.

‘That is the chief difficulty,’ he admitted. ‘I was rather hoping that Madame Bertrand might have been of use to me there. She has been devoting herself to the admiral for some days, and last night she got a pass from him, allowing the bearer to visit the ship at any time, with access to any part of it. This morning, however, she declares that she must have torn it up with her bridge scores.’

‘I suppose she can get it replaced?’ Mr Freeling Poignton suggested.

Lefant hesitated for a moment.

‘To tell you the truth,’ he declared, ‘my own belief is that the admiral declined to give it to her. Julie hates to admit defeat, however. Hence her little story. That does not trouble me very much, though. My plans are all made in another direction. Tonight is the night of the fancy-dress ball here, and the admiral is coming. When he returns to the *Magnifique*, the drawings of the torpedo will be in my possession.’

Mr Freeling Poignton laid his hand for a moment on Lefant’s shoulder.

‘Marquis,’ he said, ‘I’ve been a little led into this affair by

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you. Remember, these aren't my methods, and it's only because I see just how difficult it is to make a move that I'm standing in. But let this be understood between you and me. The moment those plans are in your possession, a copy of them is to be handed simultaneously to the Government of every civilized Power in the world, so that everyone can build the darned things if they want to.'

'Naturally,' Lefant assented. 'It is already agreed.'

'No favouritism,' Mr Freeling Poignton declared vigorously, 'no priority. We steal those plans, not to give any one nation an advantage over any other, but to put every country on the same footing.'

'It is already agreed,' Lefant repeated.

Mr Laxworthy and Mr Forrest Anderson passed along, on their way back to the hotel. Courteous greetings were exchanged between the four men. Lefant watched them with a faint smile: Mr Laxworthy with a grey shawl around his shoulders, his queer little stoop, his steel-rimmed spectacles; Anderson in his well-cut tweeds, brightly polished tan shoes, and neat Homburg hat.

'That,' Lefant remarked, inclining his head towards Mr Laxworthy, 'is exactly the type of English person whom one meets in a place like Hyères, at an hotel like this. One could swear that he lives somewhere near the British Museum, writes heavily upon some dull subject, belongs to a learned society, and has never had to make his own way in the world. He probably hates draughts, has a pet ailment, and talks about his nerves. He makes a friend of that red-faced fellow-countryman of his because he is attracted by his robust health and his sheer lack of intelligence.'

'I dare say you're right,' Mr Freeling Poignton remarked carelessly. 'What about luncheon?'

It was the night of the great fancy-dress ball at the Paradise Hotel.

E. Phillips Oppenheim

Down in the lounge the tumult became more boisterous every minute. Automobiles and carriages were all the time discharging their bevy of visitors from the neighbouring hotels and villas. A large contingent of naval officers arrived from Toulon. The ball-room was already crowded. Admiral Christodor, looking very handsome, led the promenade with Madame Bertrand, concealed under the identity of an Eastern princess. There were many who wondered what it was that he whispered in her ear as he conducted her into the ball-room.

'It was careless of me,' she admitted softly, 'but I am really quite, quite sure that it was destroyed. It was with my bridge scores, and I tore them all up without thinking. You will give me another, perhaps?'

'Whenever you will,' he promised.

'Listen,' she continued. 'To-night you must not leave me. There is a young Englishman—you understand?'

'To-night shall be mine,' the admiral answered gallantly. 'I will not quit your side for a second for all the Englishmen who ever left their sad island.'

It was a gallant speech, but if Fritz, the concierge, could have heard it he would have been puzzled; for, barely half an hour later, a gust of wind blew back the cloak of a man who was stepping into a motor-car, and his uniform was certainly the uniform of an admiral in the French navy. Through the windy darkness the motor-car rushed on its way to La Plage. The men who waited in the pinnace rose to the salute. The admiral took his place in silence, and the little petrol-driven boat tore through the water.

'The admiral takes his pleasure sadly,' one of them muttered, as their passenger climbed on to the deck.

'He has returned most devilish early,' another of them, whose thoughts were in the café at La Plage, grumbled.

The admiral turned his head sharply.

'I shall return,' he announced. 'Await me.'

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Most of the officers of the *Magnifique* were in the ball-room of the Paradise Hotel. The admiral received the salute of the lieutenant on duty, and passed at once to his cabin. Arrived there, he shut the door and listened. There was no sound save the gentle splashing of the water near the port-hole. Like lightning he turned to a cabinet set in the wall. He pulled out a drawer and touched a spring. Everything was as he had been told. A roll of papers was pushed back into a corner of this compartment. He drew the sheets out one by one, shut the cabinet quickly, and swung round. Then he stood as though turned to stone. The inner door of the cabin, which led into the sleeping apartment, was open. Seated at the table before him was Mr Laxworthy.

Lefant was a man who had passed through many crises in life. Sheer astonishment, however, on this occasion overmastered him. His *savoir-faire* had gone. He simply stood still and stared. It was surely a vision, this. It could not be that little old-fashioned man who went about with a grey shawl on his shoulders who was sitting there watching him.

'What in the devil's name are you doing there?' he demanded.

'I might ask you the same question,' Mr Laxworthy replied. 'I imagine we are both—intruders.'

Lefant recovered himself a little. He came nearer to the table.

'Tell me exactly what you want,' he insisted.

'First, let us have an understanding,' Mr Laxworthy answered, 'and as quickly as possible. For obvious reasons, the less time we spend here the better. The pinnacle which brought you is waiting, I presume, to take you back. In this light you might still pass as an Admiral, but every moment you spend here adds to the risk—for both of us. My foot is on the electric bell, which I presume would bring the admiral's steward. You perceive, too, that I have a

revolver in my hand, to the use of which I am accustomed. Am I in command, or you?’

‘It appears that you are,’ Lefant admitted grimly. ‘Go on.’

‘You hold in your hand,’ Mr Laxworthy continued, ‘the plans of the Macharin torpedo, the torpedo which is to make warfare in the future impossible.’

Then Lefant waited no longer. He flung himself almost bodily upon the little old man, who to all appearance presented such small powers of resistance. His first calculation was correct enough. Mr Laxworthy made no attempt to discharge the revolver which he held in his hand. In other respects, however, a surprise was in store for Lefant. His right hand was suddenly held in a grip of amazing strength. The fingers of Mr Laxworthy’s other hand were upon his throat.

‘If you utter a sound, remember we are both lost,’ the latter whispered.

Lefant set himself grimly to the struggle, but it lasted only a few seconds! Before he realized what had happened, his shoulders and the back of his head were upon the table and Mr Laxworthy’s fingers were like bars of steel upon his throat. He felt his consciousness going.

‘You are content to discuss this matter?’ his assailant asked calmly.

Lefant could only gasp out his answer. Mr Laxworthy released his grasp. Lefant breathed heavily for a minute or two. He was half dazed. The thing seemed impossible, yet it had happened. The breath had very nearly left his body in the grip of this insignificant-looking old man.

‘Now, if you are willing to be reasonable,’ Mr Laxworthy said, ‘remember that for both our sakes it is well we do not waste a single second.’

Lefant’s fingers stiffened upon the roll of papers, which he was still clutching. Mr Laxworthy read his thoughts unerringly.

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'I do not ask you for the plans,' he continued grimly. 'You want them for your country. I am not a patriot. My country shall fight her own battles as long as they are fought fairly. These are my terms: put back those papers, or destroy them, and pay me for my silence.'

'You do not ask, then, for the plans for yourself?' Lefant demanded.

'I do not,' Laxworthy replied. 'They belong to France. Let France keep them. You have corrupted half the ship with Poignton's dollars, but it was never in your mind to keep your faith with him. The plans were for Germany. Germany shall not have them. If I forced you to hand them over to me, I dare say I could dispose of them for—what shall we say?—a hundred thousand pounds. You shall put them back in their place and pay me ten thousand for my silence.'

'So you are an adventurer?' Lefant muttered.

'I am one who seeks adventures,' Laxworthy replied. 'We will let it go at that, if you please. Remember that you are in my power. The pressure of my foot upon this bell, or my finger upon the trigger of this revolver, and your career is over. Will you restore the plans and pay me ten thousand pounds?'

Lefant sighed.

'It is agreed,' he declared.

He turned back to the cabinet, and Laxworthy half rose in his seat to watch him restore the plans. In a few seconds the affair was finished.

'Monsieur the Admiral returns to the ball?' Mr Laxworthy remarked smoothly. 'I will avail myself of his kind offer to accept a seat in the pinnace.'

They left the cabin and made their way to the side of the ship where the pinnace was waiting, and the lieutenant stood with his hand to the salute. Secretly, the latter was a little relieved to see the two together. Once more the

pinnacle rushed towards the land. The two men walked down the wooden quay, side by side.

'You will permit me to offer you a lift to the hotel?' Lefant asked.

'With much pleasure,' Laxworthy replied, drawing his grey shawl around him. 'I find the nights chilly in these open cars, though.'

Smoothly, but at a great pace, they tore along the scented road, through a grove of eucalyptus trees, and into the grounds of the hotel whose lights were twinkling far and wide. Lefant for the first time broke the silence.

'Mr Laxworthy,' he said, 'the honours of this evening rest with you. I do not wish to ask questions that you are not likely to answer, but there is one matter on which if you would enlighten me—'

Mr Laxworthy waved his hand.

'Proceed,' he begged.

'My little enterprise of this evening,' Lefant continued slowly, 'was known of and spoken of only between Mr Freezing Pointon and myself. We discussed it in the grounds of the hotel, where we were certainly free from eavesdroppers. I am willing to believe that you are a very remarkable person, but this is not the age of miracles.'

Mr Laxworthy smiled.

'Nor is it the age,' he murmured, 'wherein we have attained sufficient wisdom to be able to define exactly what a miracle is. Ten years ago, what would-men have said of flying? Fifty years ago even the telephone was considered incredible. Has it never occurred to you, my dear Lefant, that there may be natural gifts of which one or two of us are possessed, almost as strange?'

Lefant turned in his seat.

'You mean—' he began.

Mr Laxworthy held up his hand. 'I have given you a hint,' he said; 'the rest is for you.'

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Lefant was silent for a moment.

'Tell me at least this,' he begged. 'How the devil did you get on the *Magnifique*?'

They were passing along the front by the ball-room. Admiral Christodor and Madame Bertrand were sitting near the window. Laxworthy sighed.

'The greatest men in the world,' he said, 'make fools of themselves when they put pencil to paper for the sake of a woman. . . . Take my advice, Marquis. Destroy that uniform and arrange for an alibi. In a few hours' time there will be trouble on the *Magnifique*!'

Lefant nodded. His cocked hat was thrust into the pocket of his overcoat—he was wearing a motor cap and goggles.

'There will be trouble,' he remarked dryly, 'but it will not touch you or me. As regards Madame Bertrand—'

'She is innocent,' Laxworthy assured him. 'Nevertheless, a pass on to the *Magnifique* is a little too valuable a thing to be left in a lady's chatelaine bag.'

Lefant sighed.

'One makes mistakes,' he remarked.

'And one pays!' Laxworthy agreed.

The Murder at the Duck Club

Hesketh Prichard

November Joe had come to Quebec to lay in his stores against the winter's trapping. He had told me that the best grounds in Maine were becoming poorer and poorer and that he had decided to go in on the south side of the St Lawrence, somewhere beyond Rimouski.

I knew that November was coming since two hours before his arrival a cable had been brought in for him, for when in Quebec, although he stayed at a downtown boarding-house, he was in the habit of using my office as a permanent address. I was therefore not at all surprised to hear his soft voice rallying my old clerk in the outer office. A more crabbed person than Hugh Witherspoon it would be impossible to meet, but it cannot be denied that like so many others he had a kindness for November. Presently there was a knock at the door and Joe, his hat held between his two hands, sidled into the room. He was never quite at ease except in the open, and as he came towards me with his shy smile, his moccasins fell noiselessly on the polished boards.

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I handed him his telegram, which he opened at once. It ran:

Offer you fifty dollars a day to come at once to Tamarind Duck Club.—EILEEN M. EAST.

Joe whistled and characteristically said nothing.

‘Who is Eileen M. East?’ I asked.

Joe made no reply for a moment, then he indicated the telegram and said:—

‘This has been redirected from Lavette. Postmaster Tom knew I’d be in to see you. Miss East was one of an American party I was with, ’way up on Thompson’s salmon river this spring.’

At this moment a clerk knocked and entered, bringing with him a second telegram. Joe read it:

You must come. Murder done. A matter of life and death. Please reply.—EILEEN M. EAST.

‘Will you write out an answer for me?’ asked Joe.

I nodded. Joe is slow with the pen.

“‘Miss Eileen M. East.’ Please put that, sir, and then “arriving on 8.38,” and sign.’

‘How shall I sign it?’ said I.

‘Just write “November.”’

I did so, and ringing again for the clerk I directed him to give the telegram to the boy who was waiting. There was a moment’s silence, then—

‘Can you come along, Mr Quaritch?’

I looked at the business which had accumulated on my desk, for, as I have had occasion to observe more than once, I am a very busy man indeed, or, at least, I ought to be, for my interests, as were those of my father and grandfather, are bound up with the development of the Dominion of Canada and range through the vegetable and mineral king-

doms to water-power and the lighting of many of our greatest cities.

‘Yes, but I must have ten minutes in which to give Witherspoon his instructions.’

Joe went to the door. ‘The boss wants you right away, old man,’ I heard him say.

Witherspoon shuffled into my room.

‘I’ll go and get a rig,’ continued November, ‘and have it waiting outside. We haven’t overmuch time if we’re going to call at your country place for your outfit.’

A quarter of an hour later Joe and I were bowling along in the rig drawn by a particularly good horse. I live with my sister some distance out on the St Louis road, and thither we drove at all speed.

My sister had gone out to tea with some friends, but she is well accustomed to my always erratic movements, so that I felt quite at ease when I left a note explaining that I was leaving Quebec for a day or two with November Joe.

We reached the station just in time and were soon steaming along through the farmlands that surround Quebec City.

You who read this may or may not have heard of the Tamarind Duck Club. It is a small association composed chiefly of Montreal and New York business men, to which I had leased the sporting rights of a chain of lakes lying on one of my properties not very far from the waters of the St Lawrence. To these lakes the ducks fly in from the tide each evening, and in the fall very fine sport is to be obtained there, the guns often averaging ten and twenty brace of birds, the latter number being the limit permitted to each shooter by the rules. During the season there are generally two or three members at the clubhouse, which, though but a log hut, is warm and comfortable. In fact, the Tamarind Club has a waiting list of those who desire to belong to it quite out of all proportion to its capacity.

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All these facts marshalled themselves and passed through my mind as the train rolled on, and at length I said to Joe:

'Murder done at the Tamarind Club! It seems incredible. It must be that some poacher has shot one of the guides.'

'Maybe,' said Joe, 'but Miss East said "a matter of life and death"; what can that mean? That's what I'm asking myself. But here we are! It won't be long before we know a bit more.'

The cars drew up at the little siding which is situated within a walk of the Tamarind Club. We jumped down just as a girl, possessing dark and vivid good looks of a quite arresting kind, stepped from the agent's office and caught November impulsively by the hand.

'Oh, Joe, I *am* so glad to see you!'

November Joe always had a distinct appeal to women; high or low, whatever their station in life, they like him. Of course, his looks were in his favour. Women generally do find a kind glance for six foot of strength and sinew, especially when surmounted by a perfectly poised head and features such as Joe's. He had a curious deprecating manner, too, that carried its own charm, and he appeared unable to speak two sentences to any woman without giving her the impression that he was entirely at her service—which, indeed, he was.

'When I got your message from Lavette, I come right along,' said the woodsman simply; 'Mr Quaritch come, too. It's from him the Club holds its lease.'

Miss East sent me a flash of her dark eyes, and I saw they were full of trouble.

'I hope you will be on my side, Mr Quaritch,' she said. 'Just now I need friends badly.'

'What is it, Miss Eileen?' asked Joe, as she paused.

'Uncle has been shot, Joe.'

'Mr Harrison?'

'Yes.'

'I'm terrible sorry to hear that. He was a fine, just man.'

'But that is not all. There is something even worse! . . . They say it was Mr Galt who shot him.'

'Mr Galt!' exclaimed November in surprise. 'It ain't possible!'

'I know! I know! Yet everyone believes that he did it. I sent for you to prove to them that he is innocent. You will, won't you, Joe?'

'I'll sure do my best.'

I saw her struggle for self-control; the way she got herself in hand was splendid.

'I must tell you how it happened,' she said, 'and we can be walking on at the same time, for I want you, Joe, to see the place before dark. . . . Yesterday afternoon there were five of us at the club. I was the only woman and the men settled to go out after the ducks in the evening, for though it had been wet all day, the wind went round and it began to blow clear about three o'clock. Four shooters went out; there was uncle and Mr Hinx, and Egbert Simonson, and—and Ted Galt.'

'Is that the same Mr Hinx who was salmon-fishing with us early this year?'

'Yes. . . . Most evenings I go with uncle, but yesterday the bush was so wet that I decided not to go, so the four men went, and at the usual time the others all came back. At half-past seven, I began to get anxious, so I sent Tim Carter, the head guide, to see if anything was wrong. He found my uncle dead in his screen.'

'And what brought Mr Galt's name into it?'

She hesitated for a second.

'He and uncle had a good way to go to their places, which were next to each other. They walked together, and their voices were heard, very loud, as if they were quarrelling. Egbert Simonson complained about it when he came

in—said they made enough noise to disturb the lake, and after that, of course, Ted was suspected.'

'Did Mr Galt own they'd had any words?' inquired Joe.

'Yes. Uncle was angry with him,' she admitted, and a colour showed for a moment in her cheeks. 'Ted is not a rich man, Joe; you know that.'

'Huh!' said Joe with complete comprehension. Then, after a pause, he asked: 'Who is it suspects Mr Galt?'

'It was Tim Carter who got the evidence together against him.'

'Evidence?'

'Uncle and Ted were placed next each other at the shoot.'

'And had Mr Harrison or Mr Galt the outside place?'

'Ted had.'

'Well, who was on the other side of your uncle?' I suppose there must have been someone.'

'It was Mr Hinx.'

'Then what makes Carter so sure it was Mr Galt done it?'

'Ah! That is the awful thing. My uncle was killed with number six shot.'

'Yes?'

'And Ted is the only one who uses number six size. The others all had number four.'

Joe whistled, and was silent for some moments. Then he said:

'I think, Miss Eileen, I'd as soon you didn't tell me any more. I'd like best to have Mr Galt's and Carter's stories at first-hand from theirselves.'

The girl stopped short. 'But, November, you don't believe it was Ted!'

'I sure don't,' he said. 'Mr Galt ain't that kind of a man. Where is he?'

‘Didn’t I tell you? Some police came out on the last train. They have him under arrest. It is dreadful!’

* * *

Half an hour later November Joe was face to face with Carter, who gave him no very warm welcome, and added nothing to the following statement, which he had dictated to the police inspector and signed in affidavit form:

‘Last evening roundabout five o’clock, four members of the club, Harrison, Hinx, Simonson, and Galt, started out for Reedy Neck. Reedy Neck is near half a mile long by a hundred yards wide. It is a kind of a promontory of low ground that sticks out into Goose Lake. The members walked to their places. I did not accompany them, because I had been ordered to take a canoe round to the north side of the lake, so as I could move any ducks that might pitch on that part of the lake over the guns. There are six screens on Reedy Neck. Before starting, the members drew lots for places as per Rule 16. Galt drew number one, that is the screen nearest the end of the Neck and farthest from the clubhouse. Harrison got number two. Number three was unoccupied. Hinx was in number four, and Simonson in number five.

‘Reedy Neck is covered along its whole length with bush and rushes, and the gunners cannot see one another. The screens consist of sunk pits with facings of rushes and alders.

‘The shooting began before I was round to the north side, and continued till it was dark. Several hundred ducks flew in from the estuary. I waited about ten minutes after the last shot was fired and then went back to the clubhouse. When I got there, I found Harrison had not returned. I heard this from Simonson, who was angry because, he said, Harrison and Galt had talked in loud, excited tones as they went to their places.

‘He was annoyed because he was of opinion that their

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voices had frightened some bunches of duck at which he might have got a shot.

'At half-past seven Miss East, niece to Harrison, came into the clubhouse kitchen, where I was at the time arranging to have the dead ducks picked up. You cannot pick them up while the flight is on because of scaring the others. When the wind is from the north, like it was last evening, it drifts the dead birds on to the south shore of Goose Lake. I told Noel Charles and Vinez, two of the club under-guides, to see about the pick-up. Miss East told me that her Uncle Harrison had not come in, and I had better go and see what was keeping him. She was afraid that he might have got bogged down in the swamp, as it was dark. She was worried-like, and Sitawanga Sally, the Indian squaw cook, tried to cheer her. She said the path from Reedy Neck was easy to follow.

'I left Miss East with Sally and went out. There was a bit of moonlight. I went down to Reedy Neck and found Harrison in number two screen. He was dead, and already stiff. I concluded he must have shot himself by accident. I lifted the body to carry it back. When I was about fifty yards from the club I shouted. Galt came running out. I told him Harrison had shot himself. He said, "Good God! How awful for Elie.'" 'Miss East had heard me, and was with us the next minute. She was greatly put about.

'We carried the body in and laid it on a bed. It was then I looked at the wound for the first time. Sally, the cook, was with me to lay out the body.

'I said: "He couldn't have shot himself this way."

'I said this because I saw the shot had spread so much that I knew it could not have been fired at very close quarters. Sally agreed with me. I do not know whether her opinion is worth anything. It may be. Most Indian women of sixty years old have seen dead men. I put my finger in the wound and drew out a shot. We then covered up the body with a point-four blanket and left it.

'I locked the door and took away the key. I did this because the wound was a dreadful one, and I thought it

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better that Miss East should not see the body. I then went to the gun-room and compared the shot I had taken from the wound with other sizes. It was a number six shot. The only club member who uses number six shot is Mr Galt. Harrison, Simonson, and Hinx all use number four. I said nothing to anyone about the number six shot.

'At dawn I went back to Reedy Neck and worked out all the details. It was easy, for they were plain in the soft mud. There was no sign of any one except Galt having passed number two screen. His returning footsteps were along the edge of the water until he came to number two screen where Harrison was. Then his tracks led up to the silt towards it. He must have been within twelve paces of Harrison. There he paused, as I could tell by the tracks. I suggest it was then that he fired the shot. Next he went back to the edge of the lake and continued towards the clubhouse.

'After making this examination I spoke to Simonson, the senior member. I understand that he cabled for the police.

'Signed, T. CARTER.'

I read out this statement while November listened with the curiously minute attention that he always accorded to the written or printed word. When I had finished he forbore to ask any questions, but expressed a desire to speak with Galt. We found him in the custody of a tall young trooper, who, at the command of the inspector, considerably left us to ourselves.

Joe shook hands gravely and warmly.

'Now, Mr Galt, I'm right sorry about all this, and glad that Miss Eileen sent for me.'

'She sent for you?' cried Galt.

'Sure.'

'That's the best news I've had since I was arrested. It shows that she believes I am innocent.'

'Course she does!' said Joe. 'And now will you tell me

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everything you can remember of what happened yesterday, before Mr Harrison was found dead?’

Galt was silent for a moment.

‘Here goes!’ he said at length. ‘I’ll begin at the beginning. In the early afternoon I went for a walk in the woods with Ei—Miss East. I asked her to marry me. She said, yes. I’m not a rich man, though I’m not exactly a poor one.’

‘No,’ agreed Joe, to whom a tenth of Galt’s income would have been riches beyond his farthest dream.

‘Anyway,’ continued Galt, ‘we guessed we might have trouble with her uncle, Mr Harrison, and, on the principle of not shirking a bad talk, we arranged that I was to take the first opportunity of putting Mr Harrison wise as to the position of affairs. By the time we returned to the clubhouse, we found Hinx, Simonson, Harrison, and Guide Carter just starting for the evening flight. I joined them, and, as luck would have it, I drew the next screen to Mr Harrison. Simonson and Hinx went off together, and I was left with Harrison, so I started in and told him how Eileen and I had fixed to get married.’

Joe gave the sideways jerk of the head which signified his comprehension.

‘He was furious,’ went on Galt, ‘even more angry than I expected a judge—he was a judge in the States—would ever be. He accused me of being after her dollars rather than herself.’

‘He couldn’t ’a’ really thought that,’ said Joe judicially; ‘that is, unless he was blind.’

Galt smiled.

‘Thanks, November, Elie always told me you were a courtier of the woods. As to Harrison, I dare say he would not have been so hard on me, only unfortunately I had crossed him once or twice in matters about the club. I blackballed a fellow he proposed this spring.’

‘Blackballed? What does that amount to?’ inquired Joe.

‘Opposed his becoming a member.’

‘That so? Go on.’

‘As I was telling you, he gave me the rough side of his tongue. I begged him not to decide in a hurry, as we meant to get married anyway, but we’d sooner do it with his good will. That, of course, made him madder than ever. So, seeing I was not likely to do any good just then, I left him and went to my own screen, which was next to his at the very end of the Neck.’

‘Where did you leave him?’

‘About fifty yards on this side of his screen.’

‘And after that?’

‘I had not been ten minutes in my screen when the ducks began to come in. They kept on coming. I must have fired between seventy and eighty cartridges. Harrison, too, was banging away.’

‘Could you see him?’

‘No, the reeds are too high, but more than once I saw the ducks he shot fall. I could see them because they were twenty or thirty yards high in the air.’

Joe nodded.

‘At a quarter past six the flight was pretty well over and the firing along the line grew less and less frequent. At the half-past it had stopped altogether, and I decided to go back to the clubhouse.’

‘One minute,’ put in Joe. ‘What time was it when Harrison fired the last shot that you remember?’

‘It must have been about ten minutes past six.’

‘Did any birds pass over him after that?’

‘I thought so.’

‘And he did not fire at them?’

‘No.’

‘Were you not surprised at that?’

‘Not very. It was pretty dark, and Harrison was not a quick shot.’

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'And here,' continued Joe, 'they separated. Harrison's tracks go up the bank, Galt's passes on. We'll follow Galt's first.'

Which we did. They led us straight to the duck screen he had occupied. Crouching in it as he would have done, we found that a sea of reeds shut in the view on every side. The mud floor of the screen was covered with empty shells.

'That's where he knelt waiting for the ducks,' said Joe, pointing to a circular cavity; 'his knee made that. There's little to be learnt here.'

And we began to follow Galt's trail back. The returning tracks ran along a lower line by the edge of the water, until nearly opposite the scene of the tragedy they swerved at right angles, and went up the bank to within a few yards of the screen where Harrison's body had been found.

'He stopped here,' said Joe, 'stopped for quite a while. Now Mr Quaritch, I'll see what I can find out.'

'You'll not find much,' said a voice behind us. 'At least, not much that has not been found out before. If I was you, November, I'd give it up as a bad job. Galt done it. The tracks is plain as print.'

'There's some says that print don't always tell the truth, Tim Carter,' answered Joe sturdily.

Carter, a powerful stubborn-faced woodsman, with wild brown hair and small side-whiskers, began to walk forward, but Joe held up his hand.

'Stand you back, Tim,' said he, 'I don't want you rooting around and tearing up the ground with your feet.'

Carter sat down beside me on a driftwood log that lay among the reeds, and together we watched November; I with sympathy, for Miss East's eager hopes lived in my consciousness. Carter's face, however, wore an expression of supercilious amusement.

Such a methodical examination I had rarely seen Joe make, and that very fact damped my expectations. First

of all he followed out every line of tracks. Then he made a series of measurements, and last of all began to pick up and look over the gun wads which lay about in great numbers. Suddenly he darted forward, and picked up one that lay close beside my foot.

‘You are both witnesses where I found this,’ he cried.

Carter rose ‘I’ll mark the place if you like,’ he said with a laugh.

‘That’s good! Do it.’

Carter thrust a stick into the ground. ‘Now,’ asked he, ‘what next?’

But Joe was paying no attention. He was engaged in examining the piece of driftwood from which we had risen, and the shore near the water in its vicinity. At length, evidently satisfied, he came to me.

‘I want you to take charge of this,’ he said, handing me the gun wad; ‘it’ll likely be needed in evidence.’

Carter listened and grinned. ‘Finished, Joe?’

‘Yes, here.’

‘Whereaway next?’

‘To the south shore.’

‘Want me along?’

‘Please yourself.’

It was a long walk, undertaken in silence. The two woodsmen were obviously antagonistic. Carter, being pleased to believe Galt guilty, was consequently full of suspicion towards any attitude of mind that seemed to question his conclusions. November’s point of view I had not fathomed. It is possible that he could see light where to me all was utter darkness. On the other hand, I could not, as I have said, conceive a more convincing chain of evidence than that which had led Carter straight from the crime to Galt—the quarrel, the number six shot, the fact that Galt had been within ten yards of the murdered man’s hiding-place about the time the murder must have been committed.

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I went all over it again. There seemed no break, and when I thought of Eileen East, I groaned in spirit. She believed in Galt, and, even more for her sake than for his, I longed for November to confound the sullen Carter, though how this much-to-be-desired end might be brought about I failed to see.

At length we reached the south shore.

'Any one been round this side to-day?' asked Joe.

'Can't say. If they have, you're such a plumb-sure trail-reader, you'll know, won't you?' Carter retorted grimly.

Without answering, Joe signed to us to remain where we were, while he crossed and cut diagonally from the lake shore to the mountain. After that he went down to the boathouse where the canoes were kept. A moment later his voice rose in a call. We found him looking into one of the canoes.

'When was this one last out?' he asked.

'Not since Friday.'

'That's funny,' said Joe.

We followed his pointing finger. In the bottom of the boat was a little pool of blood.

'Can you account for that, Tim Carter?'

'Vinez and Noel Charles must have taken the canoe when they picked up the shot ducks this morning,' said Carter.

'They didn't go near the boathouse,' returned Joe. 'I found their tracks. They lead down by the hill over there.'

'I suppose you think this blood's got something to do with the murder?' sneered Carter.

'I'm sure inclined that way,' said Joe.

As we walked back to the clubhouse my mind was in a whirl. I have already said that I could see little daylight through the tangle of signs and clues, and now I was aware that the prospect looked more complicated than ever. As we approached the clubhouse, Miss East, who had evidently been watching for us, ran out.

‘Well,’ she cried breathlessly, ‘what have you done? Have you found out everything?’

‘I’ll want to look over the members’ guns before I answer that,’ said Joe.

‘They are all in the gun-room.’

We entered a little annex to the club where the guns were kept.

Carter picked out one. ‘Here’s Galt’s.’

Joe lifted it carelessly. ‘Twelve calibre,’ said he, examining it.

‘Sure,’ said Carter. ‘All the others uses twelves, except Simonson. His is number ten.’

‘Which of them has two guns?’

‘Only Simonson.’

‘Where are they?’

‘Here’s the one he used last night.’

‘And the fellow to it . . . his second gun?’

‘In the case there.’

Joe picked out the weapon, fitted it together, and looked it over attentively. Then with equal care he took it apart and replaced it in the case.

‘Joe, have you nothing to tell me? Joe!’ cried Miss East, her face vivid with fear and hope.

‘I’d like to ask Sitawanga Sally a question,’ said November, ‘and maybe Mr Galt might as well hear it.’

At a sign from Eileen, Carter, with a look of deep disgust on his face, went to fetch the woman and the suspected man. Galt came in first, accompanied by the police inspector. Meanwhile Joe had taken up Galt’s gun and glanced through the barrels. As Sitawanga Sally entered, he snapped it to.

She was a full-blooded Indian and, like many of her race, now that the first bloom of youth was past, she might have been any age. Her high cheekbones and wispy hair

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surrounded sullen eyes. She stood and fixed them on Joe with an expressionless stare. November returned it.

‘Say, Sally,’ said he, at last. ‘What for you kill old man Harrison?’

‘No, no! Me not kill ‘um! Galt kill ‘um!’ she replied, showing her yellow fangs under a bulging upper lip.

Joe shook his head. ‘It don’t go any, Sally,’ said he. ‘I know you shot him with Mr Simonson’s second gun in the case over there.’

‘Me no kill ‘um! Me no kill ‘um! she cried.

Her arms, raised high for a moment in excitement, dropped suddenly, and she fell again into the stoicism which was her normal condition.

‘You’d better put in your facts, Joe,’ said the inspector briskly.

‘I’m free to own,’ began November in his soft, easy manner, ‘that it was quite a while before I could see anything to shake Carter’s evidence. My mind was made up it wasn’t Galt done it, so it must ‘a’ been somebody else. But I could find no tracks—only Galt’s and Carter’s, and Carter’s bore out his story right enough. Consequently I set out to look for a third person, and it was plain that the only way a third person could have come was in a canoe.

‘Yet there wasn’t no signs of a canoe being beached, though I searched careful for them. Still I knew the shot was never fired from the water, which was too far off from where Mr Harrison’s body was found for that to be possible. So you see it only left me one way out. Some one come in a canoe, stepped out on the big driftwood log lying near the screen, walked up along it to the end, and shot Mr Harrison from there.

‘Now the distance from the log to Mr Harrison’s body is above eleven yards, and yet the shot had not spread much—we saw that—so I guessed, whoever he was, the murderer must ‘a’ used a chokebore gun that threw the shot very

close and strong, and I began to think the thing must have been done with a bigger bore gun than a twelve. So I started to search afresh, and in time I found a wad (Mr Quaritch there has it)—a ten-bore wad recently fired.

‘Now, Mr Harrison had a twelve-bore and so’d Mr Galt. The only man who owned a ten was Mr Simonson, and he was the farthest away of all in the screen near the clubhouse. Besides, he was wearing boots with nails in the soles, and he could never ‘a’ walked down that bit of driftwood without leaving pretty clear traces. So it weren’t him, but I got pretty certain it were some one using a full-choke ten-bore and wearing either moccasins or rubbers. Another point, the murder weren’t done on impulse, but whoever was guilty had thought it all out beforehand.’

‘Why do you say that?’ chipped in the officer.

‘The number six shot. There weren’t no ten-bore shells loaded with number six. The one who done it must have loaded them cartridges o’ purpose to bring suspicion on Mr Galt.’

‘I see.’

‘Well,’ went on Joe. ‘That’s as far as the examining of Reedy Neck took me, and there was nothing better left to do but to go round and have a look at the canoes. Besides, Mr Galt told me and Mr Quaritch he’d seen some one moving about there on the south shore just after the time the murder was committed. So round we went, and there, sure enough, I come on the tracks of a pair of small moccasins leading down to the canoe house and coming up again.’

“‘Sitawanga Sally,” says I to myself, “those footmarks looks mighty like yours.””

‘But the blood, the blood in the canoe—it couldn’t have been Harrison’s?’

‘No, it weren’t,’ said Joe. ‘It were Sally’s own. She’s weak and them ten-bore guns kicks amazing. I guessed it bled her nose. Look at her swelled cheek and lip.’

All the time, as Joe's words proved how he had drawn the net round her, I watched the stoic face of the Indian squaw. When he pointed to her swollen mouth, her features took life, and an expression of the wildest and most vindictive passion that I have ever seen flashed out upon them. Recognizing the hopelessness of her position she threw aside all subterfuge.

'Yes, me kill 'um Harrison!' she cried. 'Me kill 'um good!'

'Oh, Sally,' cried Eileen. 'He was always so kind to you!'

'Harrison devil!' answered the Indian woman passionately. 'Me swear kill 'um Moon-of-Leaves time. Harrison kill 'um Prairie Chicken—my son.'

'What does she mean?' Eileen looked round wildly at us.

'I think I can tell you that,' said the inspector. 'Moon-of-Leaves means June, and wasn't Mr Harrison a judge back in the States?'

'Yes.'

'And he had sometimes to deal with the Indians from the Reserve. I remember hearing this woman's son got into trouble for stealing horses.'

'Bad man say Prairie Chicken steal 'um,' broke in Sally. 'Black clothes—black clothes—men talk-talk. Then old man Harrison talk. Take away Prairie Chicken—far, far. Me follows.'

'That's so,' said the inspector. 'I remember some judge tried Prairie Chicken, and gave him ten years. It may have been Judge Harrison. The Chicken died in gaol. If that is so, it explains everything. Indians never forget.'

'Prairie Chicken, he dead. Me swear kill 'um Harrison. Now Prairie Chicken happy. Me ready join 'um,' said the old squaw, and relapsed once more into her stolid silence.

'She thought Mr Harrison was directly responsible for the death of her son,' added the inspector.

Hesketh Prichard

‘Poor woman!’ said Eileen.

* * *

There is not much to add. Subsequent inquiries confirmed the inspector’s facts and made it clear that Sitawanga Sally, learning that Harrison belonged to the Tamarind Club, had taken service there for the direct purpose of avenging her son. No doubt she noticed the affection which was growing between Eileen and Galt, and attempted to incriminate the latter so as to obtain a fuller measure of revenge as well as to draw suspicion away from herself.

Blood for blood is still the Indian creed. It is simple and it is direct.

I think the whole case was best summed up by November himself:

‘I guess our civilized justice does seem wonderful topsyturvy to them Indians sometimes,’ said he.

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FURTHER RIVALS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES
THE CROOKED COUNTIES

For George Markstein

Introduction

This is the third and, I expect, the last of my collections of early detective stories published in the quarter of a century between the arrival on the scene of Sherlock Holmes and the outbreak of war in 1914.

I doubt whether there are many more discoveries to be made. The books—and many, even, of the magazines—in which these stories appeared are more and more difficult to find and, if found, are more and more expensive to buy.

For about ten years from 1950 onwards I kept a list of prices quoted in the catalogues of second-hand booksellers for detective stories of my chosen period. When I look through my notebook today I am struck not only by the cheapness of the books but by the large number listed and by the wide variety of the booksellers represented—many, if not most, of them no longer in existence.

During that decade prices remained fairly steady—apart from a few much-collected authors like Conan Doyle. During the last twelve years prices have multiplied by ten, twenty, even by a hundred times. *The Mystery of the Patrician Club* by a rather obscure writer called Albert Vandam, which seemed over-priced at £2 in a specialist catalogue in 1955, fetched £20 in a Sotheby sale in December 1972. First editions of William Le Queux used to be

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found in the shilling boxes. Now one may be asked for £5 or more.

But occasionally one can have a piece of luck. The pleasure of the chase has not entirely vanished.

Except in the British Museum Library I have never seen a copy of Victor L. Whitechurch's *Thrilling Stories of the Railway* which was originally published in pictorial wrappers for one shilling: nor have I ever met a second-hand bookseller who has seen one. Should some lucky person find a copy in a dusty pile in a country house library he might well get £100 or more for it from an American collector.

Almost as rare are J. S. Fletcher's *The Adventures of Archer Dawe*, the Paul Beck and Dora Myrl books by M. McD. Bodkin Q.C. (my own copy of *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective* came, rather appropriately, from the Prison Library at Holloway) and Mrs Pirkis's *Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*. First editions of Arthur Morrison, Fergus Hume and Dick Donovan can sometimes still be found—at a price.

Most of the stories in my earlier collections came from books and magazines on my own shelves. This time I have spent many hours in the British Museum Reading Room, turning over piles of books which, perhaps, have seldom or never been called for in the last sixty or eighty years.

The authors who have been completely forgotten apart from a mention in the Greene/Glover or Ellery Queen bibliographies usually deserve their obscurity. But there is a twilight world of neglected, but not completely forgotten, writers like Dick Donovan, Bodkin, Mrs Pirkis and Mrs L. T. Meade who wrote the occasional story which deserves to be resurrected, if not for its literary quality, then for some ingenuity of plot, some sudden flash of imagination, some light on the late Victorian and Edwardian world.

I put J. S. Fletcher, Victor L. Whitechurch, Richard

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Marsh, even Fergus Hume on a higher plane, to say nothing of Arthur Morrison, Ernest Bramah and Jacques Futrelle who figured in one or other of my previous collections.

The idea for the theme of this collection was given to me by Sherlock Holmes. On his way by train to Winchester to investigate the affair of the Copper Beeches he remarked to Watson: 'It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.'

So here we have sin in Yorkshire, Cheshire, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Cornwall, Dorset and other less easily identifiable counties, though on internal evidence the home counties seem to be particularly well represented. It seems to me to be, in general, a more realistic countryside than that of the country house murders so prevalent in the detective stories written between the wars. Nor is murder the invariable subject. The Victorians and Edwardians were just as interested in crimes against property.

The story by Jacques Futrelle, who was the creator of Professor S. F. X. Van Dusen, is set in a seaside hotel and since Sussex is mentioned I allow myself to assume that the hotel was in Brighton. Where else would one expect to find a house detective? This story has been buried since August 1910 in a more or less forgotten magazine called *The Story-Teller*. Original and fascinating though it is, at any rate to my mind, it never seems to have appeared in book form or to have been reprinted anywhere since. Perhaps this is to be explained by the fact that its author was drowned two years later in the Titanic disaster.

I must confess that I have cheated a little in including Fergus Hume's story *The Amber Beads*. Hagar Stanley, the heroine, works in a pawn-shop in Lambeth, but I justify myself by the fact that she is a gypsy girl from the New Forest.

Of the authors represented in this collection I gave some

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account of Arthur Morrison, Ernest Bramah and Mrs L. T. Meade in *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* and of Jacques Futrelle in *More Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*. Mrs Meade names as her collaborator for the story in this collection a certain Clifford Halifax M.D. Halifax, who makes a personal appearance in other stories as a medical detective, was the pseudonym of Dr Edgar Beaumont, who was born in 1860 and died in 1921. He had a general practice in the neighbourhood of the Crystal Palace and was a keen horseman and sportsman. According to his obituary in the *Lancet* his share in the collaboration was to supply Mrs Meade with the plots.

Mrs Catherine Louisa Pirkis published fourteen novels between 1877 and 1894, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, *Lady Detective* being the last. After that she became increasingly involved in a variety of good causes, particularly in connection with animals. With her husband, a retired naval officer, she founded the National Canine Defence League, which still flourishes. So far as writing was concerned what was lost to popular literature was gained by the anti-vivisection movement. Her funeral took place at Kensal Green on October 4, 1910.

Dick Donovan's real name was J. E. Muddock (1842-1934), later Preston-Muddock. Under both names he was a remarkably prolific writer. As Dick Donovan he wrote more than fifty detective stories and thrillers between 1889 and 1914, often with himself as the hero. Under his own name he produced an occasional thriller and another fifty or so historical novels and guide books, starting in 1873. His guide book to Switzerland became a standard work for Victorian travellers and went into seven editions. He also wrote an autobiography, *Pages from an Adventurous Life*, which was published by Werner Laurie in 1907. His life really had been adventurous. He had gone through the Indian mutiny as a 12-year-old employee of the East India Company. Like William Le Queux, Dick

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Donovan took his spy stories very seriously and prided himself on the fact that many people believed he was a real agent in the pay of the Russian Government. His other main interest in life was the Savage Club, some of whose papers he edited. One of the oldest members of the Club today who remembers him well says that, though he was so prolific on paper, he was taciturn in conversation with a somewhat oppressive personality. He had, a picturesque touch, 'downward sprouting hairs which grew not *in* his nose but from the top upper end of his nose'. One can still see a portrait of him by Eyre Macklin on the wall of the Club sitting room, long grey hair, long reddish moustache and a square cut beard. With his loose collar and tie he looks a rather self-conscious Bohemian.

Fergus Hume (1859-1932) was the author of the most successful detective story ever written, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, and I am not forgetting Conan Doyle. The first edition appeared in Melbourne in 1886, a year before the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*. At the time Hume was an impecunious barrister's clerk, and he sold the copyright for £50 to a group of speculators who formed the Hansom Cab Publishing Company. The new company started printing the book in London in July 1887 and by August 1888 it had sold 340,000 copies without its author earning a penny. Hume had been born in England and was taken as a child to Dunedin in New Zealand by his father, a doctor who was proprietor of a mental hospital. He was educated at the Otago Boys High School and the University of Otago and was admitted to the New Zealand Bar in 1885. He immediately left New Zealand for Melbourne where he tried, unsuccessfully, to write plays. After he became famous as the author of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* he moved to England where he published nearly 150 detective stories, thrillers and novels, the last of them in the year of his death, without ever attaining a fraction of the success of the book he had sold

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outright for a song. He was always dogged by bad luck. His great ambition was to see one of his plays produced and finally he had a play accepted by Sir Henry Irving. But Irving died before it could be produced and nothing more was heard of it. Hume remained a poor man and lived for about the last forty years of his life in a cottage at Thundersley in Essex, where he lies buried at the entrance to the churchyard. Thundersley, then a remote village, is now a suburb of Southend-on-Sea. Hume was a Theosophist and accepted his bad luck in life as part of his karma. He believed that he had had a previous existence as a French nobleman in the 18th century and he had vivid memories of being guillotined during the Revolution. His companion for many years at the cottage in Thundersley was a Mr John Joseph Melville, who was, apparently, a reincarnation of Roger Bacon, the 13th century philosopher and scientist.

His Honour Matthias McDonnell Bodkin, Q.C. (he took silk during the reign of Queen Victoria) died in 1933 at the age of 84. He was the author of six books of detective short stories published between 1898 and 1929. He created two detectives: Paul Beck, described as 'the rule of thumb detective', and Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective. Mr Bodkin's son, Father M. Bodkin S.J., has told me that Paul Beck 'was deliberately conceived as the opposite of Sherlock Holmes, unromantic.' He relied more on common sense in solving his cases than on inspiration and in one story it is said that he looked 'more like a respectable retired milkman than a detective'. Dora Myrl was a much more emotional and romantic figure. Mr Bodkin had the brilliant idea of marrying off his two detectives, and in due course they had a son, Young Beck, and a book was devoted to his adventures. Perhaps it is just as well that Mr Bodkin was a busy man or the process might have been continued *ad infinitum*. In fact Mr Bodkin does not seem to have set much store by his detective stories. In his entertaining book of reminiscences, *Recollections of an Irish Judge*, published

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in 1914, he does not even mention them. He was a member of the Irish Bar and as a young man seems to have earned more money through journalism than through his occasional briefs. In 1892 during Gladstone's last period as Prime Minister he was elected Irish Nationalist M.P. for North Roscommon, and he gives a rather charming account of his short period at Westminster—he did not stand again in the election called by Lord Rosebery. 'A Member of Parliament,' he writes, 'of simple tastes, who makes up his mind, as I did, to dispense with all luxuries, including alcohol and tobacco, and take all his meals except breakfast within the precincts of the House of Commons, can be fairly comfortable on £150 a year.' Although he took silk he evidently continued to devote more of his time to journalism and the theatre in Dublin, and to books on Law and Irish history, than to the Bar until he was appointed County Court Judge of Clare. One could wish that he had made use of his experiences as a Judge for a new series of detective stories. He had the right ideas. During his retirement he used to tell his son that he deplored the fact that the detective story had become a murder story. Murderers, he said, were the most stupid criminals and con-men the best material. During the Irish Rebellion Judge Bodkin courageously denounced acts of violence committed both by the rebels and by the armed forces of the Crown. The Bodkin Report of February 1921, which he read in open court at Ennis, Co Clare, listed 139 cases in which it was proved that criminal injuries were committed by the British regular and auxiliary forces in the County of Clare. Mr Asquith in the House of Commons quoted Judge Bodkin's declaration that 'Law and order could not be upheld by competition in crime' and described the Report as 'one of the gravest indictments ever presented by a judicial officer against the Executive Government in a free country.'

Joseph Smith Fletcher (1868–1935) was one of the most

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prolific English writers of all time. Although it is sometimes difficult to disentangle reprints of his books under new titles from the original publications, he produced, by my count, close on 200 books between 1879, when he published his juvenile poems, and 1934. What distinguishes him from other prolific writers of his time, like Fergus Hume, Dick Donovan, William Le Queux and E. Phillips Oppenheim is his astounding versatility. Poems, novels, detective stories, theology, topographical and archaeological books about Yorkshire, historical works (including a history of the St Leger and a three-volume Picturesque History of Yorkshire) biographies (including lives of Cardinal Newman and Lord Roberts) all poured from his pen. He found time, too, for a great mass of occasional journalism and lectures and was a very good cricketer. He was one of the leading writers of detective stories from 1918 until his death and was given a flying start in the United States by the praise of President Woodrow Wilson. I find the earlier stories about Archer Dawe, his tough old Yorkshire private detective, more attractive. 'Archer Dawe was now a man of sixty—a little squat-figured man, who dressed, Sunday or week-day, in rusty black; was never seen, indoors or out, without a very high-crowned, wide-brimmed silk hat; and who wore old-fashioned stick-up collars, held tightly to his wizened throat by swathes of black neck-cloth. He was a notable figure enough, seen in this wise, and in company with a Gamp-like umbrella which he always carried with him wherever he went, wet or fine; but few people noticed his garments when they had looked at his face. It was at most times more of a mask than a face: there was a high, bulging forehead; a small nose; a straight, hard line of a mouth; a square, determined jaw and chin. And deep-set in the general pallor of the face were two eyes—dark, inscrutable, steady as steel, with a curious penetrating light that seemed to burn far back in mysterious, unreachable recesses.'

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One would like to know more about Richard Marsh who died of what was described as heart failure at Haywards Heath in Sussex at the age of 57 in 1915. He was the author of some genuinely horrifying horror stories, particularly *The Beetle* and *The Goddess*. The opening chapters of *The Beetle* in which a tramp, taking refuge from the rain in what he believes to be an empty house, is attacked by a monstrous insect can still make the flesh creep. Perhaps this dark and morbid side of his imagination accounts for the aggressive normality of his entry under Recreation in *Who's Who*: 'He loved them all—cricket, football, golf, cycling, billiards, chess, bridge, motoring and a dozen more. A clumsy but enthusiastic student of whatever made for proficiency in the fine art of doing nothing.' He published in all about seventy novels and collections of short stories, most of them mysteries of one sort or another. He had been educated at Eton and Oxford and started writing stories for magazines for boys at the age of twelve. During the last two years of his life he was an invalid and dictated his last books to a secretary. 'Rarely,' says his obituary in the *Mid-Sussex Times*, 'was there occasion to alter a word after he had uttered it.' That, perhaps, had been the trouble all his life. In most of his books there are chapters which make one feel that he had it in him to be a thriller writer of the first rank, but then will come long passages of such slack and careless writing that all tension is lost.

Canon Victor Lorenzo Whitechurch (1868–1933) led a quiet and uneventful life which is reflected in such novels of clerical life as *The Canon in Residence* and *The Bishop out of Residence*, which have been occasionally reprinted. As a country clergyman and later as Honorary Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, he produced in the 1920s a succession of equally quiet and uneventful detective stories set in country places which appealed to the public taste of the time. For some unknown reason the railway crime stories which he had written while still a curate in the early part

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of the century were never reprinted and some never appeared in book form at all. And yet the young clergyman had invented in Thorpe Hazell, vegetarian, hypochondriac and railway expert, one of the most original detectives of the time, and the stories have a more astringent flavour than his bland later work.

In two of the stories in this book *The Case of Janissary* and *The Amber Beads* I have made some slight changes and omitted a few sentences which would be incomprehensible out of the context of the books in which they originally appeared. In *The Affair of the German Dispatch-Box* I have included at the beginning a description of Thorpe Hazell which is actually taken from another story.

Perhaps I may conclude this introduction by drawing attention to a remark made by Loveday Brooke in *The Redhill Sisterhood*. 'The popular detective stories,' she said, 'for which there seems so large a demand at the present day, must be, at times, uncommonly useful to the criminal classes.'

I

The Redhill Sisterhood

Catherine Louisa Pirkis

‘They want you at Redhill, now,’ said Mr Dyer, taking a packet of papers from one of his pigeon-holes. ‘The idea seems gaining ground in many quarters that in cases of mere suspicion, women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are less likely to attract attention. And this Redhill affair, so far as I can make out, is one of suspicion only.’

It was a dreary November morning; every gas jet in the Lynch Court office was alight, and a yellow curtain of outside fog draped its narrow windows.

‘Nevertheless, I suppose one can’t afford to leave it uninvestigated at this season of the year, with country-house robberies beginning in so many quarters,’ said Miss Brooke.

‘No; and the circumstances in this case certainly seem to point in the direction of the country-house burglar. Two days ago a somewhat curious application was made privately, by a man giving the name of John Murray, to Inspector Gunning, of the Reigate police—Redhill, I must tell you, is in the Reigate police district. Murray stated that he had been a greengrocer in South London, had sold his business there, and had, with the proceeds of the sale, bought two small houses in Redhill, intending to let the

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one and live in the other. These houses are situated in a blind alley, known as Paved Court, a narrow turning leading off the London and Brighton coach road. Paved Court has been known to the sanitary authorities for the past ten years as a regular fever nest, and as the houses which Murray bought—numbers 7 and 8—stand at the very end of the blind alley, with no chance of thorough ventilation, I dare say the man got them for next to nothing. He told the Inspector that he had had great difficulty in procuring a tenant for the house he wished to let, number 8, and that consequently when, about three weeks back, a lady, dressed as a nun, made him an offer for it, he immediately closed with her. The lady gave her name simply as "Sister Monica", and stated that she was a member of an undenominational Sisterhood that had recently been founded by a wealthy lady, who wished her name kept a secret. Sister Monica gave no references, but, instead, paid a quarter's rent in advance, saying that she wished to take possession of the house immediately, and open it as a home for crippled orphans.'

'Gave no references—home for cripples,' murmured Loveday, scribbling hard and fast in her note-book.

'Murray made no objection to this,' continued Mr Dyer, 'and, accordingly, the next day, Sister Monica, accompanied by three other Sisters and some sickly children, took possession of the house, which they furnished with the barest possible necessities from cheap shops in the neighbourhood. For a time, Murray said, he thought he had secured most desirable tenants, but during the last ten days suspicions as to their real character have entered his mind, and these suspicions he thought it his duty to communicate to the police. Among their possessions, it seems, these Sisters number an old donkey and a tiny cart, and thus they start daily on a sort of begging tour through the adjoining villages, bringing back every evening a perfect hoard of broken victuals and bundles of old garments. Now comes the extraordinary fact on which Murray bases his

suspicious. He says, and Gunning verifies his statement, that in whatever direction those Sisters turn the wheels of their donkey-cart, burglaries, or attempts at burglaries, are sure to follow. A week ago they went along towards Horley, where, at an outlying house, they received much kindness from a wealthy gentleman. That very night an attempt was made to break into that gentleman's house—an attempt, however, that was happily frustrated by the barking of the house-dog. And so on in other instances that I need not go into. Murray suggests that it might be as well to have the daily movements of these Sisters closely watched, and that extra vigilance should be exercised by the police in the districts that have had the honour of a morning call from them. Gunning coincides with this idea, and so has sent to me to secure your services.'

Loveday closed her note-book. 'I suppose Gunning will meet me somewhere and tell me where I'm to take up my quarters?' she said.

'Yes; he will get into your carriage at Merstham—the station before Redhill—if you will put your hand out of the window, with the morning paper in it. By the way, he takes it for granted that you will take the 11.5 train from Victoria. Murray, it seems, has been good enough to place his little house at the disposal of the police, but Gunning does not think espionage could be so well carried on there as from other quarters. The presence of a stranger in an alley of that sort is bound to attract attention. So he has hired a room for you in a draper's shop that immediately faces the head of the court. There is a private door to this shop of which you will have the key, and can let yourself in and out as you please. You are supposed to be a nursery governess on the lookout for a situation, and Gunning will keep you supplied with letters to give colour to the idea. He suggests that you need only occupy the room during the day, at night you will find far more comfortable quarters at Laker's Hotel, just outside the town.'

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This was about the sum total of the instructions that Mr Dyer had to give.

The 11.5 train from Victoria, that carried Loveday to her work among the Surrey Hills, did not get clear of the London fog till well away on the other side of Purley. When the train halted at Merstham, in response to her signal, a tall, soldier-like individual made for her carriage, and, jumping in, took the seat facing her. He introduced himself to her as Inspector Gunning, recalled to her memory a former occasion on which they had met, and then, naturally enough, turned the talk upon the present suspicious circumstances they were bent upon investigating.

'It won't do for you and me to be seen together,' he said; 'of course I am known for miles round, and any one seen in my company will be at once set down as my coadjutor, and spied upon accordingly. I walked from Redhill to Merstham on purpose to avoid recognition on the platform at Redhill, and half-way here, to my great annoyance, found that I was being followed by a man in a workman's dress and carrying a basket of tools. I doubled, however, and gave him the slip, taking a short cut down a lane which, if he had been living in the place, he would have known as well as I did. By Jove!' this was added with a sudden start, 'there is the fellow, I declare; he has weathered me after all, and has no doubt taken good stock of us both, with the train going at this snail's pace. It was unfortunate that your face should have been turned towards that window, Miss Brooke.'

'My veil is something of a disguise, and I will put on another cloak before he has a chance of seeing me again,' said Loveday.

All she had seen in the brief glimpse that the train had allowed, was a tall, powerfully-built man walking along the siding of the line. His cap was drawn low over his eyes, and in his hand he carried a workman's basket.

Gunning seemed much annoyed at the circumstance.

‘Instead of landing at Redhill,’ he said, ‘we’ll go on to Three Bridges, and wait there for a Brighton train to bring us back, that will enable you to get to your room somewhere between the lights; I don’t want to have you spotted before you’ve so much as started your work.’

Then they went back to their discussion of the Redhill Sisterhood.

‘They call themselves “undenominational”, whatever that means,’ said Gunning, ‘they say they are connected with no religious sect whatever, they attend sometimes one place of worship, sometimes another, sometimes none at all. They refuse to give up the name of the founder of their order, and really no one has any right to demand it of them, for, as no doubt you see, up to the present moment the case is one of mere suspicion, and it may be a pure coincidence that attempts at burglary have followed their footsteps in this neighbourhood. By the way, I have heard of a man’s face being enough to hang him, but until I saw Sister Monica’s, I never saw a woman’s face that could perform the same kind of office for her. Of all the lowest criminal types of faces I have ever seen, I think hers is about the lowest and most repulsive.’

After the Sisters, they passed in review the chief families resident in the neighbourhood.

‘This,’ said Gunning, unfolding a paper, ‘is a map I have specially drawn up for you—it takes in the district for ten miles round Redhill, and every country house of any importance is marked on it in red ink. Here, in addition, is an index of those houses, with special notes of my own to every house.’

Loveday studied the map for a minute or so, then turned her attention to the index.

‘Those four houses you’ve marked, I see, are those that have been already attempted. I don’t think I’ll run them through, but I’ll mark them “doubtful”; you see the gang—for, of course, it is a gang—might follow our reasoning on

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the matter, and look upon those houses as our weak point. Here's one I'll run through, "house empty during winter months",—that means plate and jewellery sent to the bankers. Oh! and this one may as well be crossed off, 'father and four sons all athletes and sportsmen', that means firearms always handy—I don't think burglars will be likely to trouble them. Ah! now we come to something! Here's a house to be marked "tempting" in a burglar's list. "Wootton Hall, lately changed hands and rebuilt, with complicated passages and corridors. Splendid family plate in daily use and left entirely in the care of the butler." I wonder does the master of that house trust to his "complicated passages" to preserve his plate for him? A dismissed dishonest servant would supply a dozen maps of the place for half a sovereign. What do these initials, "E.L." against the next house in the list, North Cape, stand for?

'Electric lighted. I think you might almost cross that house off also. I consider electric lighting one of the greatest safeguards against burglars that a man can give his house.'

'Yes, if he doesn't rely exclusively upon it; it might be a nasty trap under certain circumstances. I see this gentleman also has magnificent presentation and other plate.'

'Yes . . . Mr Jameson is a wealthy man and very popular in the neighbourhood; his cups and epergnes are worth looking at.'

'Is it the only house in the district that is lighted with electricity?'

'Yes; and, begging your pardon, Miss Brooke, I only wish it were not so. If electric lighting were generally in vogue it would save the police a lot of trouble on these dark winter nights.'

'The burglars would find some way of meeting such a condition of things, depend upon it; they have reached a very high development in these days. They no longer stalk about as they did fifty years ago with blunderbuss and bludgeon; they plot, plan, contrive, and bring imagination

and artistic resource to their aid. By the way, it often occurs to me that the popular detective stories, for which there seems so large a demand at the present day, must be, at times, uncommonly useful to the criminal classes.'

At Three Bridges they had to wait so long for a return train that it was nearly dark when Loveday got back to Redhill. Mr Gunning did not accompany her thither, having alighted at a previous station. Loveday had directed her portmanteau to be sent direct to Laker's Hotel, where she had engaged a room by telegram from Victoria Station. So, unburthened by luggage, she slipped quietly out of the Redhill Station and made her way straight for the draper's shop in the London Road. She had no difficulty in finding it, thanks to the minute directions given her by the Inspector.

Street lamps were being lighted in the sleepy little town as she went along, and as she turned into the London Road, shopkeepers were lighting up their windows on both sides of the way. A few yards down this road, a dark patch between the lighted shops showed her where Paved Court led off from the thoroughfare. A side door of one of the shops that stood at the corner of the court seemed to offer a post of observation whence she could see without being seen, and here Loveday, shrinking into the shadows, ensconced herself in order to take stock of the little alley and its inhabitants. She found it much as it had been described to her—a collection of four-roomed houses of which more than half were unlet. Numbers 7 and 8 at the head of the court presented a slightly less neglected appearance than the other tenements. Number 7 stood in total darkness, but in the upper window of number 8 there showed what seemed to be a night-light burning, so Loveday conjectured that this possibly was the room set apart as a dormitory for the little cripples.

While she stood thus surveying the home of the suspected Sisterhood, the Sisters themselves—two, at least,

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of them—came into view, with their donkey-cart and their cripples, in the main road. It was an odd little cortege. One Sister, habited in a nun's dress of dark blue serge, led the donkey by the bridle; another Sister, similarly attired, walked alongside the low cart, in which were seated two sickly-looking children. They were evidently returning from one of their long country circuits, and, unless they had lost their way and been belated, it certainly seemed a late hour for the sickly little cripples to be abroad.

As they passed under the gas lamp at the corner of the court, Loveday caught a glimpse of the faces of the Sisters. It was easy, with Inspector Gunning's description before her mind, to identify the older and taller woman as Sister Monica, and a more coarse-featured and generally repellent face Loveday admitted to herself she had never before seen. In striking contrast to this forbidding countenance was that of the younger Sister. Loveday could only catch a brief passing view of it, but that one brief view was enough to impress it on her memory as of unusual sadness and beauty. As the donkey stopped at the corner of the court, Loveday heard this sad-looking young woman addressed as 'Sister Anna' by one of the cripples, who asked plaintively when they were going to have something to eat.

'Now, at once,' said Sister Anna, lifting the little one, as it seemed to Loveday, tenderly out of the cart, and carrying him on her shoulder down the court to the door of number 8, which opened to them at their approach. The other Sister did the same with the other child; then both Sisters returned, unloaded the cart of sundry bundles and baskets, and, this done, led off the old donkey and trap down the road, possibly to a neighbouring costermonger's stables

A man, coming along on a bicycle, exchanged a word of greeting with the Sisters as they passed, then swung himself off his machine at the corner of the court, and walked

it along the paved way to the door of number 7. This he opened with a key, and then, pushing the machine before him, entered the house.

Loveday took it for granted that this man must be the John Murray of whom she had heard. She had closely scrutinized him as he had passed her, and had seen that he was a dark, well-featured man of about fifty years of age.

She congratulated herself on her good fortune in having seen so much in such a brief space of time, and, coming forth from her sheltered corner, turned her steps in the direction of the draper's shop on the other side of the road.

It was easy to find. 'Golightly' was the singular name that figured above the shop-front, in which were displayed a variety of goods calculated to meet the wants of servants and the poorer classes generally. A tall, powerfully-built man appeared to be looking in at the window. Loveday's foot was on the doorstep of the draper's private entrance, her hand on the door-knocker, when this individual, suddenly turning, convinced her of his identity with the journeyman workman who had so disturbed Mr Gunning's equanimity. It was true he wore a bowler instead of a journeyman's cap, and he no longer carried a basket of tools, but there was no possibility for any one, with so good an eye for an outline as Loveday possessed, not to recognize the carriage of the head and shoulders as that of the man she had seen walking along the railway siding. He gave her no time to make minute observation of his appearance, but turned quickly away, and disappeared down a by-street.

Loveday's work seemed to bristle with difficulties now. Here was she, as it were, unearthed in her own ambush; for there could be but little doubt that during the whole time she had stood watching those Sisters, that man, from a safe vantage-point, had been watching her.

She found Mrs Golightly a civil and obliging person. She showed Loveday to her room above the shop, brought her the letters which Inspector Gunning had been careful to

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have posted to her during the day. Then she supplied her with pen and ink and, in response to Loveday's request, with some strong coffee that she said, with a little attempt at a joke, would 'keep a dormouse awake all through the winter without winking.'

While the obliging landlady busied herself about the room, Loveday had a few questions to ask about the Sisterhood who lived down the court opposite. On this head, however, Mrs Golightly could tell her no more than she already knew, beyond the fact that they started every morning on their rounds at eleven o'clock punctually, and that before that hour they were never to be seen outside their door.

Loveday's watch that night was to be a fruitless one. Although she sat, with her lamp turned out and safely screened from observation, until close upon midnight, with eyes fixed upon numbers 7 and 8, Paved Court, not so much as a door opening or shutting at either house rewarded her vigil. The lights flitted from the lower to the upper floors in both houses, and then disappeared, somewhere between nine and ten in the evening; and after that, not a sign of life did either tenement show.

And all through the long hours of that watch, again and again there seemed to flit before her mind's eye, as if in some sort it were fixed upon its retina, the sweet, sad face of Sister Anna.

Why it was this face should so haunt her, she found it hard to say.

'It has a mournful past and a mournful future written upon it as a hopeless whole,' she said to herself. 'It is the face of an Andromeda! "Here am I", it seems to say, "tied to my stake, helpless and hopeless".'

The church clocks were sounding the midnight hour as Loveday made her way through the dark streets to her hotel outside the town. As she passed under the railway arch that ended in the open country road, the echo of not

very distant footsteps caught her ear. When she stopped they stopped, when she went on they went on, and she knew that once more she was being followed and watched, although the darkness of the arch prevented her seeing even the shadow of the man who was thus dogging her steps.

The next morning broke keen and frosty. Loveday studied her map and her country-house index over a seven o'clock breakfast, and then set off for a brisk walk along the country road. No doubt in London the streets were walled in and roofed with yellow fog; here, however, bright sunshine playing in and out of the bare tree-boughs and leafless hedges on to a thousand frost spangles, turned the prosaic macadamized road into a gangway fit for Queen Titania herself and her fairy train.

Loveday turned her back on the town and set herself to follow the road as it wound away over the hill in the direction of a village called Northfield. Early as she was, she was not to have that road to herself. A team of strong horses trudged by on their way to their work in the fuller's-earth pits. A young fellow on a bicycle flashed past at a tremendous pace, considering the upward slant of the road. He looked hard at her as he passed, then slackened speed, dismounted, and awaited her coming on the brow of the hill.

'Good-morning, Miss Brooke,' he said, lifting his cap as she came alongside of him. 'May I have five minutes' talk with you?'

The young man who thus accosted her had not the appearance of a gentleman. He was a handsome, bright-faced young fellow of about two-and-twenty, and was dressed in ordinary cyclist's dress; his cap was pushed back from his brow over thick, curly, fair hair, and Loveday, as she looked at him, could not repress the thought how well he would look at the head of a troop of cavalry, giving the order to charge the enemy.

He led his machine to the side of the footpath.

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'You have the advantage of me,' said Loveday; 'I haven't the remotest notion who you are.'

'No,' he said; 'although I know you, you cannot possibly know me. I am a north-country man, and I was present, about a month ago, at the trial of old Mr Craven, of Troyte's Hill—in fact, I acted as reporter for one of the local papers. I watched your face so closely as you gave your evidence that I should know it anywhere, among a thousand.'

'And your name is . . .?'

'George White, of Grenfell. My father is part proprietor of one of the Newcastle papers. I am a bit of a literary man myself, and sometimes figure as a reporter, sometimes as leader-writer, to that paper.' Here he gave a glance towards his side pocket, from which protruded a small volume of Tennyson's poems.

The facts he had stated did not seem to invite comment, and Loveday ejaculated merely:

'Indeed!'

The young man went back to the subject that was evidently filling his thoughts. 'I have special reasons for being glad to have met you this morning, Miss Brooke,' he went on, making his footsteps keep pace with hers. 'I am in great trouble, and I believe you are the only person in the whole world who can help me out of that trouble.'

'I am rather doubtful as to my power of helping any one out of trouble,' said Loveday; 'so far as my experience goes, our troubles are as much a part of ourselves as our skins are of our bodies.'

'Ah, but not such trouble as mine,' said White eagerly. He broke off for a moment, then, with a sudden rush of words, told her what that trouble was. For the past year he had been engaged to be married to a young girl, who, until quite recently, had been fulfilling the duties of a nursery governess in a large house in the neighbourhood of Redhill.

'Will you kindly give me the name of that house?' interrupted Loveday.

‘Certainly; Wootton Hall, the place is called, and Annie Lee is my sweetheart’s name. I don’t care who knows it!’ He threw his head back as he said this, as if he would be delighted to announce the fact to the whole world. ‘Annie’s mother,’ he went on, ‘died when she was a baby, and we both thought her father was dead also, when suddenly, about a fortnight ago, it came to her knowledge that, instead of being dead, he was serving his time at Portland for some offence committed years ago.’

‘Do you know how this came to Annie’s knowledge?’

‘Not the least in the world; I only know that I suddenly got a letter from her announcing the fact, and, at the same time, breaking off her engagement with me. I tore the letter into a thousand pieces, and wrote back saying I would not allow the engagement to be broken off, but would marry her if she would have me. To this letter she did not reply; there came instead a few lines from Mrs Copeland, the lady at Wootton Hall, saying that Annie had thrown up her engagement, and joined some Sisterhood, and that she, Mrs Copeland, had pledged her word to Annie to reveal to no one the name and whereabouts of that Sisterhood.’

‘And I suppose you imagine I am able to do what Mrs Copeland is pledged not to do?’

‘That’s just it, Miss Brooke!’ cried the young man enthusiastically. ‘You do such wonderful things; everyone knows you do. It seems as if, when anything is wanting to be found out, you just walk into a place, look round you, and, in a moment, everything becomes clear as noon-day.’

‘I can’t quite lay claim to such wonderful powers as that. As it happens, however, in the present instance, no particular skill is needed to find out what you wish to know, for I fancy I have already come upon the traces of Miss Annie Lee.’

‘Miss Brooke!’

‘Of course, I cannot say for certain, but it is a matter you

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can easily settle for yourself—settle, too, in a way that will confer a great obligation on me.'

'I shall be only too delighted to be of any, the slightest, service to you!' cried White, enthusiastically as before.

'Thank you. I will explain. I came down here specially to watch the movements of a certain Sisterhood who have somehow aroused the suspicions of the police. Well, I find that instead of being able to do this, I am myself so closely watched—possibly by confederates of these Sisters—that unless I can do my work by deputy I may as well go back to town at once.'

'Ah! I see—you want me to be that deputy.'

'Precisely. I want you to go to the room in Redhill that I have hired, take your place at the window—screened, of course, from observation—at which I ought to be seated—watch as closely as possible the movements of these Sisters, and report them to me at the hotel, where I shall remain shut in from morning till night—it is the only way in which I can throw my persistent spies off the scent. Now, in doing this for me, you will be doing yourself a good turn, for I have little doubt but what under the blue serge hood of one of the Sisters you will discover the pretty face of Miss Annie Lee.'

As they talked they had walked, and now stood on the top of the hill at the head of the one little street that constituted the whole of the village of Northfield.

On their left hand stood the village school and the master's house, nearly facing these, on the opposite side of the road, beneath a clump of elms, stood the village pound. Beyond this pound, on either side of the way, were two rows of small cottages with tiny squares of garden in front, and in the midst of these small cottages a swinging sign beneath a lamp announced a 'Postal and Telegraph Office'.

'Now that we have come into the land of habitations again,' said Loveday, 'it will be best for us to part. It will not do for you and me to be seen together, or my spies will

be transferring their attentions from me to you, and I shall have to find another deputy. You had better start on your bicycle for Redhill at once, and I will walk back at leisurely speed. Come to me at my hotel without fail at one o'clock and report proceedings. I do not say anything definite about remuneration, but I assure you, if you carry out my instructions to the letter, your services will be amply rewarded by me and by my employers.'

There were yet a few more details to arrange. White had been, he said, only a day and night in the neighbourhood, and special directions as to the locality had to be given to him. Loveday advised him not to attract attention by going to the draper's private door, but to enter the shop as if he were a customer, and then explain matters to Mrs Golightly, who, no doubt, would be in her place behind the counter; tell her he was the brother of the Miss Smith who had hired her room, and ask permission to go through the shop to that room, as he had been commissioned by his sister to read and answer any letters that might have arrived there for her.

'Show her the key of the side door—here it is,' said Loveday; 'it will be your credentials, and tell her you did not like to make use of it without acquainting her with the fact.'

The young man took the key, endeavouring to put it in his waistcoat pocket, found the space there occupied, and so transferred it to the keeping of a side pocket in his tunic.

All this time Loveday stood watching him.

'You have a capital machine there,' she said, as the young man mounted his bicycle once more, 'and I hope you will turn it to account in following the movements of these Sisters about the neighbourhood. I feel confident you will have something definite to tell me when you bring me your first report at one o'clock.'

White once more broke into a profusion of thanks, and

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then, lifting his cap to the lady, started his machine at a fairly good pace.

Loveday watched him out of sight down the slope of the hill, then, instead of following him as she had said she would 'at a leisurely pace,' she turned her steps in the opposite direction along the village street.

It was an altogether ideal country village. Neatly-dressed, chubby-faced children, now on their way to the school, dropped quaint little curtseys, or tugged at curly locks as Loveday passed; every cottage looked the picture of cleanliness and trimness, and, although so late in the year, the gardens were full of late flowering chrysanthemums and early flowering Christmas roses.

At the end of the village, Loveday came suddenly into view of a large, handsome, red-brick mansion. It presented a wide frontage to the road, from which it lay back amid extensive pleasure grounds. On the right hand, and a little in the rear of the house, stood what seemed to be large and commodious stables, and immediately adjoining these stables was a low-built, red-brick shed, that had evidently been recently erected.

That low-built, red-brick shed excited Loveday's curiosity.

'Is this house called North Cape?' she asked of a man, who chanced at that moment to be passing with a pickaxe and shovel.

The man answered in the affirmative, and Loveday then asked another question: Could he tell her what was that small shed so close to the house—it looked like a glorified cowhouse—now what could be its use?

The man's face lighted up as if it were a subject on which he liked to be questioned. He explained that that small shed was the engine-house where the electricity that lighted North Cape was made and stored. Then he dwelt with pride upon the fact, as if he held a personal interest in it, that North Cape was the only house, far or near, that was thus lighted.

‘I suppose the wires are carried underground to the house,’ said Loveday, looking in vain for signs of them anywhere.

The man was delighted to go into details on the matter. He had helped to lay those wires, he said: they were two in number, one for supply and one for return, and were laid three feet below ground, in boxes filled with pitch. They were switched on to jars in the engine-house, where the electricity was stored, and, after passing underground, entered the family mansion under the flooring at its western end.

Loveday listened attentively to these details, and then took a minute and leisurely survey of the house and its surroundings. This done, she retraced her steps through the village, pausing, however, at the ‘Postal and Telegraph Office’ to despatch a telegram to Inspector Gunning.

It was one to send the Inspector to his cipher-book. It ran as follows:

Rely solely on chemist and coal-merchant throughout the day. L B.

After this, she quickened her pace, and in something over three-quarters of an hour was back again at her hotel.

There she found more of life stirring than when she had quitted it in the early morning. There was to be a meeting of the ‘Surrey Stags’, about a couple of miles off, and a good many hunting men were hanging about the entrance of the house, discussing the chances of sport after last night’s frost. Loveday made her way through the throng in leisurely fashion, and not a man but what had keen scrutiny from her sharp eyes. No, there was no cause for suspicion there; they were evidently one and all just what they seemed to be—loud-voiced, hard-riding men, bent on a day’s sport; but—and here Loveday’s eyes travelled beyond the hotel courtyard to the other side of the road—who was that man with a bill-hook hacking at the hedge there—a

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thin-featured, round-shouldered old fellow, with a bent-about hat? It might be as well not to take it too rashly for granted that her spies had withdrawn, and had left her free to do her work in her own fashion.

She went upstairs to her room. It was situated on the first floor in the front of the house, and consequently commanded a good view of the high road. She stood well back from the window, and at an angle whence she could see and not be seen, took a long, steady survey of the hedger. And the longer she looked the more convinced she was that the man's real work was something other than the bill-hook seemed to imply. He worked, so to speak, with his head over his shoulder, and when Loveday supplemented her eyesight with a strong field-glass, she could see more than one stealthy glance shot from beneath his bent-about hat in the direction of her window.

There could be little doubt about it: her movements were to be as closely watched to-day as they had been yesterday. Now it was of first importance that she should communicate with Inspector Gunning in the course of the afternoon: the question to solve was how it was to be done?

To all appearance Loveday answered the question in extraordinary fashion. She pulled up her blind, she drew back her curtain, and seated herself, in full view, at a small table in the window recess. Then she took a pocket ink-stand from her pocket, a packet of correspondence cards from her letter-case, and with rapid pen set to work on them.

About an hour and a half afterwards, White, coming in, according to his promise, to report proceedings, found her still seated at the window, not, however, with writing materials before her, but with needle and thread in her hand, with which she was mending her gloves.

'I return to town by the first train tomorrow morning,' she said as he entered, 'and I find these wretched things want no end of stitches. Now for your report.'

White appeared to be in an elated frame of mind. 'I've seen her!' he cried, 'my Annie—they've got her, those confounded Sisters; but they sha'n't keep her—no, not if I have to pull the house down about their ears to get her out!'

'Well, now you know where she is, you can take your time about getting her out,' said Loveday. 'I hope, however, you haven't broken faith with me, and betrayed yourself by trying to speak with her, because, if so, I shall have to look for another deputy.'

'Honour, Miss Brooke!' answered White indignantly. 'I stuck to my duty, though it cost me something to see her hanging over those kids and tucking them into the cart, and never say a word to her, never so much as wave my hand.'

'Did she go out with the donkey-cart to-day?'

'No, she only tucked the kids into the cart with a blanket, and then went back to the house. Two old Sisters, ugly as sin, went out with them. I watched them from the window, jolt, jolt, jolt, round the corner, out of sight, and then I whipped down the stairs, and on to my machine, and was after them in a trice, and managed to keep them well in sight for over an hour and a half.'

'And their destination to-day was?'

'Wootton Hall.'

'Ah, just as I expected.'

'Just as you expected?' echoed White.

'I forgot. You do not know the nature of the suspicions that are attached to this Sisterhood, and the reasons I have for thinking that Wootton Hall, at this season of the year, might have an especial attraction for them.'

White continued staring at her. 'Miss Brooke,' he said presently, in an altered tone, 'whatever suspicions may attach to the Sisterhood, I'll stake my life on it, my Annie has had no share in any wickedness of any sort.'

'Oh, quite so, it is most likely that your Annie has, in some way, been inveigled into joining these Sisters—has

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been taken possession of by them, in fact, just as they have taken possession of the little cripples.'

'That's it! that's it!' he cried excitedly; 'that was the idea that occurred to me when you spoke to me on the hill about them, otherwise you may be sure . . .'

'Did they get relief of any sort at the Hall?' interrupted Loveday.

'Yes; one of the two ugly old women stopped outside the lodge gates with the donkey-cart, and the other beauty went up to the house alone. She stayed there, I should think, about a quarter of an hour, and when she came back was followed by a servant, carrying a bundle and a basket.'

'Ah! I've no doubt they brought away with them something else beside old garments and broken victuals.'

White stood in front of her, fixing a hard, steady gaze upon her.

'Miss Brooke,' he said presently, in a voice that matched the look on his face, 'what do you suppose was the real object of these women in going to Wootton Hall this morning?'

'Mr White, if I wished to help a gang of thieves break into Wootton Hall to-night, don't you think I should be greatly interested in procuring for them the information that the master of the house was away from home; that two of the men-servants, who slept in the house, had recently been dismissed and their places had not yet been filled; also that the dogs were never unchained at night, and that their kennels were at the side of the house at which the butler's pantry is not situated? These are particulars I have gathered in this house without stirring from my chair, and I am satisfied that they are likely to be true. At the same time, if I were a professional burglar, I should not be content with information that was likely to be true, but would be careful to procure such that was certain to be true, and so would set accomplices to work at the fountain head. Now do you understand?'

White folded his arms and looked down on her.

‘What are you going to do?’ he asked, in short, brusque tones.

Loveday looked him full in the face. ‘Communicate with the police immediately,’ she answered; ‘and I should feel greatly obliged if you would at once take a note from me to Inspector Gunning at Reigate.’

‘And what becomes of Annie?’

‘I don’t think you need have any anxiety on that head. I have no doubt that when the circumstances of her admission to the Sisterhood are investigated, it will be proved that she has been as much deceived and imposed upon as the man, John Murray, who so foolishly let his house to these women. Remember, Annie has Mrs Cope-land’s good word to support her integrity.’

White stood silent for awhile.

‘What sort of a note do you wish me to take to the Inspector?’ he presently asked.

‘You shall read it as I write it, if you like,’ answered Loveday. She took a correspondence card from her letter-case, and, with an indelible pencil, wrote as follows—

Wootton Hall is threatened to-night—concentrate attention there. L.B.

White read the words as she wrote them with a curious expression passing over his handsome features.

‘Yes,’ he said, curtly as before; ‘I’ll deliver that, I give you my word, but I’ll bring back no answer to you. I’ll do no more spying for you—it’s a trade that doesn’t suit me. There’s a straightforward way of doing straightforward work, and I’ll take that way—no other—to get my Annie out of that den.’

He took the note, which she sealed and handed to him, and strode out of the room

Loveday, from the window, watched him mount his bicycle. Was it her fancy, or did there pass a swift, furtive

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glance of recognition between him and the hedger on the other side of the way as he rode out of the courtyard?

She seemed determined to make that hedger's work easy for him. The short winter's day was closing in now, and her room must consequently have been growing dim to outside observation. She lighted the gas chandelier which hung from the ceiling, and, still with blinds and curtains undrawn, took her old place at the window, spread writing materials before her, and commenced a long and elaborate report to her chief at Lynch Court.

About half an hour afterwards, she threw a casual glance across the road, and saw that the hedger had disappeared, but that two ill-looking tramps sat munching bread and cheese under the hedge to which his bill-hook had done so little service. Evidently the intention was, one way or another, not to lose sight of her so long as she remained in Redhill.

Meantime, White had delivered Loveday's note to the Inspector at Reigate, and had disappeared on his bicycle once more.

Gunning read it without a change of expression. Then he crossed the room to the fireplace and held the card as close to the bars as he could without scorching it.

'I had a telegram from her this morning,' he explained to his confidential man, 'telling me to rely upon chemicals and coals throughout the day, and that, of course, meant that she would write to me in invisible ink. No doubt this message about Wootton Hall means nothing . . .'

He broke off abruptly, exclaiming: 'Eh! what's this!' as, having withdrawn the card from the fire, Loveday's real message stood out in bold, clear characters between the lines of the false one.

Thus it ran:

North Cape will be attacked to-night—a desperate gang—be prepared for a struggle. Above all, guard the

electrical engine-house. On no account attempt to communicate with me; I am so closely watched that any endeavour to do so may frustrate your chance of trapping the scoundrels. L.B.

That night when the moon went down behind Reigate Hill an exciting scene was enacted at North Cape. The *Surrey Gazette*, in its issue the following day, gave the sub-joined account of it under the heading, 'Desperate Encounter with Burglars'.

'Last night, "North Cape", the residence of Mr Jameson, was the scene of an affray between the police and a desperate gang of burglars. "North Cape" is lighted throughout by electricity, and the burglars, four in number, divided in half—two being told off to enter and rob the house, and two to remain at the engine-shed, where the electricity is stored, so that, at a given signal, should need arise, the wires might be unswitched, the inmates of the house thrown into sudden darkness and confusion, and the escape of the marauders thereby facilitated. Mr Jameson, however, had received timely warning from the police of the intended attack, and he, with his two sons, all well-armed, sat in darkness in the inner hall awaiting the coming of the thieves. The police were stationed, some in the stables, some in out-buildings nearer to the house, and others in more distant parts of the grounds. The burglars effected their entrance by means of a ladder placed to a window of the servants' staircase, which leads straight down to the butler's pantry and to the safe where the silver is kept. The fellows, however, had no sooner got into the house than two policemen, issuing from their hiding-place outside, mounted the ladder after them and thus cut off their retreat. Mr Jameson and his two sons, at the same moment, attacked them in front, and thus overwhelmed by numbers the scoundrels were easily secured. It was at the engine-house outside that the sharpest struggle took

place. The thieves had forced open the door of this engine-shed with their jemmies immediately on their arrival, under the very eyes of the police, who lay in ambush in the stables, and when one of the men, captured in the house, contrived to sound an alarm on his whistle, these outside watchers made a rush for the electrical jars, in order to unswitch the wires. Upon this the police closed upon them, and a hand-to-hand struggle followed, and if it had not been for the timely assistance of Mr Jameson and his sons, who had fortunately conjectured that their presence here might be useful, it is more than likely that one of the burglars, a powerfully-built man, would have escaped.

'The names of the captured men are John Murray, Arthur and George Lee (father and son), and a man with so many *aliases* that it is difficult to know which is his real name. The whole thing had been most cunningly and carefully planned. The elder Lee, lately released from penal servitude for a similar offence, appears to have been prime mover in the affair. This man had, it seems, a son and a daughter, who, through the kindness of friends, had been fairly well placed in life; the son at an electrical engineer's in London, the daughter as nursery governess at Wootton Hall. Directly this man was released from Portland, he seems to have found out his children and done his best to run them both. He was constantly at Wootton Hall endeavouring to induce his daughter to act as an accomplice to a robbery of the house. This so worried the girl that she threw up her situation and joined a Sisterhood that had recently been established in the neighbourhood. Upon this, Lee's thoughts turned in another direction. He induced his son, who had saved a little money, to throw up his work in London, and join him in his disreputable career. The boy is a handsome young fellow, but appears to have in him the makings of a first-class criminal. In his work as an electrical engineer he had made the acquaintance of the man John Murray, who, it is said, has been rapidly going down-

hill of late. Murray was the owner of the house rented by the Sisterhood that Miss Lee had joined, and the idea evidently struck the brains of these three scoundrels that this Sisterhood, whose antecedents were not generally known, might be utilized to draw off the attention of the police from themselves and from the especial house in the neighbourhood that they had planned to attack. With this end in view, Murray made an application to the police to have the Sisters watched, and still further to give colour to the suspicions he had endeavoured to set afloat concerning them, he and his confederates made feeble attempts at burglary upon the houses at which the Sisters had called, begging for scraps. It is a matter for congratulation that the plot, from beginning to end, has been thus successfully unearthed, and it is felt on all sides that great credit is due to Inspector Gunning and his skilled coadjutors for the vigilance and promptitude they have displayed throughout the affair.'

Loveday read aloud this report, with her feet on the fender of the Lynch Court office.

'Accurate, so far as it goes,' she said, as she laid down the paper.

'But we want to know a little more,' said Mr Dyer. 'In the first place, I would like to know what it was that diverted your suspicions from the unfortunate Sisters?'

'The way in which they handled the children,' answered Loveday promptly. 'I have seen female criminals of all kinds handling children, and I have noticed that although they may occasionally—even this is rare—treat them with a certain rough sort of kindness, of tenderness they are utterly incapable. Now Sister Monica, I must admit, is not pleasant to look at, at the same time, there was something absolutely beautiful in the way in which she lifted the little cripple out of the cart, put his tiny thin hand round her neck, and carried him into the house. By the way, I would like to ask some rabid physiognomist how he would account

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for Sister Monica's repulsiveness of features as contrasted with young Lee's undoubted good looks—heredity, in this case, throws no light on the matter.'

'Another question,' said Mr Dyer, not paying heed to Loveday's digression; 'how was it you transferred your suspicions to John Murray?'

'I did not do so immediately, although at the very first it had struck me as odd that he should be so anxious to do the work of the police for them. The chief thing I noticed concerning Murray, on the first and only occasion on which I saw him, was that he had had an accident with his bicycle, for in the right-hand corner of his lamp-glass there was a tiny star, and the lamp itself had a dent on the same side, had also lost its hook, and was fastened to the machine by a bit of electric fuse. The next morning, as I was walking up the hill towards Northfield, I was accosted by a young man mounted on that selfsame bicycle—not a doubt of it—star in glass, dent, fuse, all there.'

'Ah, that sounded an important key-note, and led you to connect Murray and the younger Lee immediately.'

'It did, and, of course, also at once gave the lie to his statement that he was a stranger in the place, and confirmed my opinion that there was nothing of the north-countryman in his accent. Other details in his manner and appearance gave rise to other suspicions. For instance, he called himself a press reporter by profession, and his hands were coarse and grimy, as only a mechanic's could be. He said he was a bit of a literary man, but the Tennyson that showed so obtrusively from his pocket was new, and in parts uncut, and totally unlike the well-thumbed volume of the literary student. Finally, when he tried and failed to put my latchkey into his waistcoat pocket, I saw the reason lay in the fact that the pocket was already occupied by a soft coil of electric fuse, the end of which protruded. Now, an electric fuse is what an electrical engineer might almost unconsciously carry about with him, it is so essential a part

Catherine Louisa Pirkis

of his working tools, but it is a thing that a literary man or a press reporter could have no possible use for.'

'Exactly, exactly. And it was, no doubt, that bit of electric fuse that turned your thoughts to the one house in the neighbourhood lighted by electricity, and suggested to your mind the possibility of electrical engineers turning their talents to account in that direction. Now, will you tell me what, at that stage of your day's work, induced you to wire to Gunning that you would bring your invisible ink bottle into use?'

'That was simply a matter of precaution; it did not compel me to the use of invisible ink, if I saw other safe methods of communication. I felt myself being hemmed in on all sides with spies, and I could not tell what emergency might arise. I don't think I have ever had a more difficult game to play. As I walked and talked with the young fellow up the hill, it became clear to me that if I wished to do my work I must lull the suspicions of the gang, and seem to walk into their trap. I saw by the persistent way in which Wootton Hall was forced on my notice that it was wished to fix my suspicions there. I accordingly, to all appearance, did so, and allowed the fellows to think they were making a fool of me.'

'Ha! ha! Capital, that—the biter bit, with a vengeance! Splendid idea to make that young rascal himself deliver the letter that was to land him and his pals in jail. And he all the time laughing in his sleeve and thinking what a fool he was making of you! Ha, ha, ha!' And Mr Dyer made the office ring again with his merriment.

'The only person one is at all sorry for in this affair is poor little Sister Anna,' said Loveday pityingly, 'and yet, perhaps, all things considered, after her sorry experience of life, she may not be so badly placed in a Sisterhood where practical Christianity—not religious hysterics—is the one and only rule of the order.'

II

The Loss of Sammy Throckett

Arthur Morrison

It was, of course, always a part of Martin Hewitt's business to be thoroughly at home among any and every class of people, and to be able to interest himself intelligently, or to appear to do so, in their various pursuits. In one of the most important cases ever placed in his hands, he could have gone but a short way towards success had he not displayed some knowledge of the more sordid aspects of professional sport, and a great interest in the undertakings of a certain dealer therein. The great case itself had nothing to do with sport, and, indeed, from a narrative point of view, was somewhat uninteresting; but the man who alone held the one piece of information wanted was a keeper, backer, or 'gaffer' of professional pedestrians, and it was through the medium of his pecuniary interest in such matters that Hewitt was enabled to strike a bargain with him.

The man was a publican on the outskirts of Padfield, a northern town pretty famous for its sporting tastes, and to Padfield, therefore, Hewitt betook himself, and, arrayed in a way to indicate some inclination of his own toward sport, he began to frequent the bar of the 'Hare and

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Hounds'. Kentish, the landlord, was a stout, bullnecked man, of no great communicativeness at first; but after a little acquaintance he opened out wonderfully, became quite a jolly (and rather intelligent) companion, and came out with innumerable anecdotes of his sporting adventures. He could put a very decent dinner on the table, too, at the 'Hare and Hounds', and Hewitt's frequent invitation to him to join therein and divide a bottle of the best in the cellar soon put the two on the very best of terms. Good terms with Mr Kentish was Hewitt's great desire, for the information he wanted was of a sort that could never be extracted by casual questioning, but must be a matter of open communication by the publican, extracted in what way it might be.

'Look here,' said Kentish one day, 'I'll put you on to a good thing, my boy—a real good thing. Of course you know all about the Padfield 185 Yards Handicap being run off now?'

'Well, I haven't looked into it much,' Hewitt replied. 'Ran the first round of heats last Saturday and Monday, didn't they?'

'They did. Well'—Kentish spoke in a stage whisper as he leaned over and rapped the table—'I've got the final winner in this house.' He nodded his head, took a puff at his cigar, and added, in his ordinary voice, 'Don't say nothing.'

'No, of course not. Got something on, of course?'

'Rather—what do *you* think? Got any price I liked. Been saving him up for this. Why, he's got twenty-one yards, and he can do even time all the way! Fact! Why, he could win runnin' back'ards. He won his heat on Monday like—like—like that!' The gaffer snapped his fingers, in default of a better illustration, and went on. 'He might ha' took it a little easier, *I* think—it's shortened his price, of course, him jumpin' in by two yards. But you can get decent odds now, if you go about it right. You take my tip—back him for his heat next Saturday, in the ~~second~~

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round, and for the final. You'll get a good price for the final, if you pop it down at once. But don't go makin' a song of it, will you, now? I'm givin' you a tip I wouldn't give anybody else.'

'Thanks very much—it's awfully good of you. I'll do what you advise. But isn't there a dark horse anywhere else?'

'Not dark to me, my boy, not dark to me. I know every man runnin' like a book. Old Taylor—him over at the Cop—he's got a very good lad—eighteen yards, and a very good lad indeed; and he's a tryer this time, I know. But, bless you, my lad could give him ten, instead o' taking three, and beat him then! When I'm runnin' a real tryer, I'm generally runnin' something very near a winner, you bet, and this time, mind, *this* time, I'm runnin' the certaintest winner I *ever* run—and I don't often make a mistake. You back him.'

'I shall, if you're as sure as that. But who is he?'

'Oh, Throckett's his name—Sammy Throckett. He's quite a new lad. I've got young Steggles looking after him—sticks to him like wax. Takes his little breathers in my bit o'ground at the back here. I've got a cinder sprint path there, over behind the trees. I don't let him out o' sight much, I can tell you. He's a straight lad, and he knows it'll be worth his while to stick to me; but there's some 'ud poison him, if they thought he'd spoil their books.'

Soon afterward the two strolled toward the tap-room 'I expect Sammy'll be there,' the landlord said, 'with Steggles. I don't hide him too much—they'd think I'd got something extra on, if I did.'

In the tap-room sat a lean, wire-drawn-looking youth, with sloping shoulders and a thin face, and by his side was a rather short, thick-set man, who had an odd air, no matter what he did, of proprietorship and surveillance of the lean youth. Several other men sat about, and there was loud laughter, under which the lean youth looked sheepishly

'Tarn't no good, Sammy lad,' some one was saying. 'You a makin' after Nancy Webb—she'll ha' nowt to do with 'ee.'

'Don' like 'em so thread-papery,' added another. 'No, Sammy, you aren't the lad for she. I see her . . .'

'What about Nancy Webb?' asked Kentish, pushing open the door. 'Sammy's all right, anyway. You keep fit, my lad, an' go on improving, and some day you'll have as good a house as me. Never mind the lasses. Had his glass o' beer, has he?' This to Raggy Steggles, who, answering in the affirmative, viewed his charge as though he were a post, and the beer a recent coat of paint.

'Has two glasses of mild a-day,' the landlord said to Hewitt. 'Never puts on flesh, so he can stand it. Come out now.' He nodded to Steggles, who rose, and marched Sammy Throckett away for exercise.

* * *

On the following afternoon (it was Thursday), as Hewitt and Kentish chatted in the landlord's own snugery, Steggles burst into the room in a great state of agitation and spluttered out: 'He—he's bolted; gone away!'

'What?'

'Sammy—gone. Hooked it *I* can't find him.'

The landlord stared blankly at the trainer, who stood with a sweater dangling from his hand, and stared blankly back 'What d'ye mean?' Kentish said at last. 'Don't be a fool. He's in the place somewhere; find him.'

But this Steggles defied anybody to do. He had looked already. He had left Throckett at the cinder-path behind the trees, in his running-gear, with the addition of the long overcoat and cap he used in going between the path and the house, to guard against chill 'I was goin' to give him a bust or two with the pistol,' the trainer explained, 'but when we got over t'other side, "Raggy," ses he, "it's blawin' a bit chilly. I think I'll ha' a sweater—there's one on my box,

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ain't there?" So in I coomes for the sweater, and it weren't on his box, and when I found it and got back—he weren't there. They'd seen nowt o' him in t' house, and he weren't nowhere.'

Hewitt and the landlord, now thoroughly startled, searched everywhere, but to no purpose. 'What should he go off the place for?' asked Kentish, in a sweat of apprehension. "'Tain't chilly a bit—it's warm—he didn't want no sweater; never wore one before. It was a piece of kid to be able to clear out. Nice thing, this is. I stand to win two years' takings over him. Here—you'll have to find him.'

'Ah—but how?' exclaimed the disconcerted trainer, dancing about distractedly. 'I've got all I could scrape on him myself where can I look?'

Here was Hewitt's opportunity. He took Kentish aside and whispered. What he said startled the landlord considerably. 'Yes, I'll tell you all about that,' he said, 'if that's all you want. It's no good or harm to me, whether I tell or no. But can you find him?'

'That I can't promise, of course. But you know who I am now, and what I'm here for. If you like to give me the information I want, I'll go into the case for you, and, of course, I shan't charge any fee. I may have luck, you know, but I can't promise, of course.'

The landlord looked in Hewitt's face for a moment. Then he said, 'Done! It's a deal.'

'Very good,' Hewitt replied; 'get together the one or two papers you have, and we'll go into my business in the evening. As to Throckett, don't say a word to anybody. I'm afraid it must get out, since they all know about it in the house, but there's no use in making any unnecessary noise. Don't make hedging bets or do anything that will attract notice. Now we'll go over to the back and look at this cinder-path of yours.'

Here Steggles, who was still standing near, was struck with an idea. 'How about old Taylor, at the Cop, guv'nor,

eh?' he said, meaningly. 'His lad's good enough to win, with Sammy out, and Taylor is backing him plenty. Think he knows anything o' this?'

'That's likely,' Hewitt observed, before Kentish could reply. 'Yes. Look here—suppose Steggles goes and keeps his eye on the Cop for an hour or two, in case there's anything to be heard of? Don't show yourself, of course.'

Kentish agreed, and the trainer went. When Hewitt and Kentish arrived at the path behind the trees, Hewitt at once began examining the ground. One or two rather large holes in the cinders were made, as the publican explained, by Throckett, in practising getting off his mark. Behind these were several fresh tracks of spiked shoes. The tracks led up to within a couple of yards of the high fence bounding the ground, and there stopped abruptly and entirely. In the fence, a little to the right of where the tracks stopped, there was a stout door. This Hewitt tried, and found ajar.

'That's always kept bolted,' Kentish said; 'he's gone out that way—he couldn't have gone any other without comin' through the house.'

'But he isn't in the habit of making a step three yards long, is he?' Hewitt asked, pointing at the last footmark and then at the door, which was quite that distance away from it. 'Besides,' he added, opening the door, 'there's no footprint here nor outside'

The door opened on a lane, with another fence and a thick plantation of trees at the other side. Kentish looked at the footmarks, then at the door, then down the lane, and finally back towards the house. 'That's a lick,' he said.

'This is a quiet sort of lane,' was Hewitt's next remark. 'No houses in sight. Where does it lead?'

'That way it goes to the Old Kilns—disused. This way down to a turning off the Padfield and Catton Road.'

Hewitt returned to the cinder-path again, and once more examined the footmarks. He traced them back over the

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grass toward the house. 'Certainly,' he said, 'he hasn't gone back to the house. Here is the double line of tracks, side by side, *from* the house—Steggles's ordinary boots with iron tips and Throckett's running pumps—thus they came out. Here is Steggles's track in the opposite direction alone, made when he went back for the sweater. Throckett remained—you see various prints in those loose cinders at the end of the path where he moved this way and that, and then two or three paces toward the fence—not directly toward the *door*, you notice—and there they stop dead, and there are no more, either back or forward. Now, if he had wings, I should be tempted to the opinion that he flew straight away in the air from that spot—unless the earth swallowed him and closed again without leaving a wrinkle on its face.'

Kentish stared gloomily at the tracks, and said nothing.

'However,' Hewitt resumed, 'I think I'll take a little walk now, and think over it. You go into the house and show yourself at the bar. If anybody wants to know how Throckett is, he's pretty well, thank you. By the bye, can I get to the Cop—this place of Taylor's—by this back lane?'

'Yes, down to the end leading to the Catton Road, turn to the left, and then first on the right. Any one'll show you the Cop,' and Kentish shut the door behind the detective, who straightway walked—toward the Old Kilns.

In little more than an hour he was back. It was now becoming dusk, and the landlord was looking out papers from a box near the side window of his snugery, for the sake of the extra light. 'I've got these papers together for you,' he said, as Hewitt entered. 'Any news?'

'Nothing very great. Here's a bit of handwriting I want you to recognize, if you can. Get a light.'

Kentish lit a lamp, and Hewitt laid upon the table half a dozen small pieces of torn paper, evidently fragments of a letter which had been torn up.

The landlord turned the scraps over, regarding them dubiously. 'These aren't much to recognize, anyhow. I don't know the writing. Where did you find 'em?'

'They were lying in the lane at the back, a little way down. Plainly they are pieces of a note addressed to some one called Sammy or something very like it. See the first piece with its "mmy"? That is clearly from the beginning of the note, because there is no line between it and the smooth, straight edge of the paper above; also, nothing follows on the same line. Some one writes to Throckett—presuming it to be a letter addressed to him, as I do for other reasons—as Sammy It is a pity that there is no more of the letter to be found than these pieces. I expect the person who tore it up put the rest in his pocket and dropped these by accident.'

Kentish, who had been picking up and examining each piece in turn, now dolorously broke out:—

'Oh, it's plain he's sold us—bolted and done us; me as took him out o'the gutter, too. Look here—"throw them over"; that's plain enough—can't mean anything else. Means throw *me* over, and my friends—me, after what I've done for him. Then "right away"—go right away I s'pose, as he has done. Then,' he was fiddling with the scraps and finally fitted two together, 'why, look here, this one with "lane" on its fits over the one about throwing over, and it says "poor f" where it's torn; that means "poor fool", I s'pose—*me*, or "fathead", or something like that That's nice Why, I'd twist his neck if I could get hold of him; and I will!'

Hewitt smiled 'Perhaps it's not quite so uncomplimentary after all,' he said. 'If you can't recognize the writing, never mind. But if he's gone away to sell you, it isn't much use finding him, is it? He won't win if he doesn't want to.'

'Why, he wouldn't dare to rope under my very eyes. I'd—I'd . . .'

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‘Well, well; perhaps we’ll get him to run after all, and as well as he can. One thing is certain—he left this place of his own will. Further, I think he is in Padfield now—he went toward the town, I believe. And I don’t think he means to sell you.’

‘Well, he shouldn’t. I’ve made it worth his while to stick to me. I’ve put a fifty on him out of my own pocket, and told him so; and if he won, that would bring him a lump more than he’d probably get by going crooked, besides the prize money, and anything I might give him over. But it seems to me he’s putting me in the cart altogether.’

‘That we shall see. Meantime, don’t mention anything I’ve told you to any one—not even to Steggles. He can’t help us, and he might blurt things out inadvertently. Don’t say anything about these pieces of paper, which I shall keep myself. By the bye, Steggles is indoors, isn’t he? Very well, keep him in. Don’t let him be seen hunting about this evening. I’ll stay here tonight and we’ll proceed with Throckett’s business in the morning. And now we’ll settle *my* business, please.’

* * *

In the morning Hewitt took his breakfast in the snugery, carefully listening to any conversation that might take place at the bar. Soon after nine o’clock a fast dog-cart stopped outside, and a red-faced, loud-voiced man swaggered in, greeting Kentish with boisterous cordiality. He had a drink with the landlord, and said. ‘How’s things? Fancy any of ’em for the sprint handicap? Got a lad o’ your own in, haven’t you?’

‘Oh, yes,’ Kentish replied. ‘Throckett. Only a young ’un—not got to his proper mark yet, I reckon. I think old Taylor’s got No. 1 this time.’

‘Capital lad,’ the other replied, with a confidential nod. ‘Shouldn’t wonder at all. Want to do anything yourself over it?’

‘No—I don’t think so. I’m not on at present. Might have a little flutter on the grounds just for fun; nothing else.’

There were a few more casual remarks, and then the red-faced man drove away.

‘Who was that?’ asked Hewitt, who had watched the visitor through the snugger window.

‘That’s Danby—bookmaker. Cute chap; he’s been told Throckett’s missing, I’ll bet anything, and come here to pump me. No good though. As a matter of fact, I’ve worked Sammy Throckett into his books for about half I’m in for altogether—through third parties, of course.’

Hewitt reached for his hat. ‘I’m going out for half an hour now,’ he said. ‘If Steggles wants to go out before I come back, don’t let him. Let him go and smooth over all those tracks on the cinder-path, very carefully. And, by the bye, could you manage to have your son about the place to-day, in case I happen to want a little help out of doors?’

‘Certainly; I’ll get him to stay in. But what do you want the cinders smoothed for?’

Hewitt smiled and patted his host’s shoulder. ‘I’ll explain all my little tricks when the job’s done,’ he said, and went out.

* * *

On the lane from Padfield to Sedby village stood the ‘Plough’ beerhouse, wherein J. Webb was licensed to sell by retail beer to be consumed on the premises or off, as the thirsty list. Nancy Webb, with a very fine colour, a very curly fringe, and a wide-smiling mouth revealing a fine set of teeth, came to the bar at the summons of a stoutish old gentleman with spectacles, who walked with a stick.

The stoutish old gentleman had a glass of bitter beer and then said, in the peculiarly quiet voice of a very deaf man, ‘Can you tell me, if you please, the way into the main Catton Road?’

‘Down the lane, turn to the right at the cross roads, then first to the left.’

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The old gentleman waited with his hand to his ear for some few seconds after she had finished speaking, and then resumed, in his whispering voice, 'I'm afraid I'm very deaf this morning.' He fumbled in his pocket and produced a notebook and pencil. 'May I trouble you to write it down? I'm so very deaf at times, that I—thank you.'

The girl wrote the direction, and the old gentleman bade her good morning and left. All down the lane he walked slowly with his stick. At the cross roads he turned, put the stick under his arm, thrust the spectacles into his pocket, and strode away in the ordinary guise of Martin Hewitt. He pulled out his note-book, examined Miss Webb's direction very carefully, and then went off another way altogether, towards the 'Hare and Hounds'.

Kentish lounged moodily in his bar. 'Well, my boy,' said Hewitt, 'has Steggles wiped out the tracks?'

'Not yet—I haven't told him. But he's somewhere about—I'll tell him now.'

'No, don't. I don't think we'll have that done, after all. I expect he'll want to go out soon—at any rate, some time during the day. Let him go whenever he likes. I'll sit upstairs a bit in the club-room.'

'Very well. But how do you know Steggles will be going out?'

'Well, he's pretty restless after his lost *protégé*, isn't he. I don't suppose he'll be able to remain idle long.'

'And about Throckett. Do you give him up?'

'Oh, no. Don't you be impatient. I can't say I'm quite confident yet of laying hold of him—the time is so short, you see—but I shall at least have news for you by the evening.'

* * *

Hewitt sat in the club-room until the afternoon, taking his lunch there. At length he saw, through the front window, Raggy Steggles walking down the road. In an instant Hewitt was downstairs and at the door. The road bent

eighty yards away, and as soon as Steggles passed the bend the detective hurried after him.

All the way to Padfield town and more than half through it Hewitt dodged the trainer. In the end Steggles stopped at a corner and gave a note to a small boy who was playing near. The boy ran with the note to a bright, well-kept house at the opposite corner. Martin Hewitt was interested to observe the legend 'H. Danby, Contractor', on a board over a gate in the side wall of the garden behind this house. In five minutes a door in the side gate opened, and the head and shoulders of the red-faced man emerged. Steggles immediately hurried across and disappeared through the gate.

This was both interesting and instructive. Hewitt took up a position in a side street and waited. In ten minutes the trainer reappeared and hurried off the way he had come, along the street Hewitt had considerably left clear for him. Then Hewitt strolled toward the smart house and took a good look at it. At one corner of the small piece of forecourt garden, near the railings, a small, baize-covered, glass-fronted notice board stood on two posts. On its top edge appeared the words 'H. Danby. Houses to be Sold or Let'. But the only notice pinned to the green baize within was an old and dusty one, inviting tenants for three shops, which were suitable for any business, and which would be fitted to suit tenants. Apply within.

Hewitt pushed open the front gate and rang the door-bell. 'There are some shops to let, I see,' he said, when a maid appeared 'I should like to see them, if you will let me have the key.'

'Master's out, sir. You can't see the shops till Monday.'

'Dear me, that's unfortunate. I'm afraid I can't wait till Monday. Didn't Mr Danby leave any instructions, in case anybody should inquire?'

'Yes, sir—as I've told you. He said anybody who called about 'em come again on Monday.'

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'Oh, very well, then; I suppose I must try. One of the shops is in High Street, isn't it?'

'No, sir; they're all in the new part—Granville Road.'

'Ah, I'm afraid that will scarcely do. But I'll see. Good day.'

Martin Hewitt walked away a couple of streets' lengths before he inquired the way to Granville Road. When at last he found that thoroughfare, in a new and muddy suburb, crowded with brick-heaps and half-finished streets, he took a slow walk along its entire length. It was a melancholy example of baffled enterprise. A row of a dozen or more shops had been built before any population had arrived to demand goods. Would-be tradesmen had taken many of these shops, and failure and disappointment stared from the windows. Some were half covered by shutters, because the scanty stock scarce sufficed to fill the remaining half. Others were shut almost altogether, the inmates only keeping open the door for their own convenience, and perhaps keeping down a shutter for the sake of a little light. Others again had not yet fallen so low, but struggled bravely still to maintain a show of business and prosperity, with very little success. Opposite the shops there still remained a dusty, ill-treated hedge and a forlorn-looking field, which an old board offered on building leases. Altogether a most depressing spot.

There was little difficulty in identifying the three shops offered for letting by Mr H. Danby. They were all together near the middle of the row, and were the only ones that appeared not yet to have been occupied. A dusty 'To Let' bill hung in each window, with written directions to inquire of Mr H. Danby or at No. 7. Now, No. 7 was a melancholy baker's shop, with a stock of three loaves and a plate of stale buns. The disappointed baker assured Hewitt that he usually kept the keys of the shops, but that the landlord, Mr Danby, had taken them away the day before, to see how the ceilings were standing, and had not returned

them. 'But if you was thinking of taking a shop here,' the poor baker added, with some hesitation, 'I—I—if you'll excuse my advising you—I shouldn't recommend it. I've had a sickener of it myself.'

Hewitt thanked the baker for his advice, wished him better luck in future, and left. To the 'Hare and Hounds' his pace was brisk. 'Come,' he said, as he met Kentish's inquiring glance, 'this has been a very good day, on the whole. I know where our man is now, and I think we can get him by a little management.'

'Where is he?'

'Oh, down in Padfield. As a matter of fact, he's being kept there against his will, we shall find. I see that your friend, Mr Danby, is a builder as well as a bookmaker.'

'Not a regular builder. He speculates in a street of new houses now and again, that's all. But is he in it?'

'He's as deep in it as anybody, I think. Now don't fly into a passion. There are a few others in it as well, but you'll do harm if you don't keep quiet.'

'But go and get the police—come and fetch him, if you know where they're keeping him; why . . .'

'So we will, if we can't do it without them. But it's quite possible we can, and without all the disturbance and, perhaps, delay that calling in the police would involve. Consider, now, in reference to your arrangements. Wouldn't it pay you better to get him back quietly, without a soul knowing—perhaps not even Danby knowing—till the heat is run to-morrow?'

'Well, yes, it would, of course.'

'Very good then, so be it. Remember what I have told you about keeping your mouth shut—say nothing to Steggles or anybody. Is there a cab or brougham your son and I can have for the evening?'

'There's an old hiring landau in the stables you can shut up into a cab, if that'll do.'

'Excellent. We'll run down to the town in it as soon as

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it's ready. But, first, a word about Throckett. What sort of a lad is he? Likely to give them trouble, show fight, and make a disturbance?'

'No, I should say not. He's no plucked 'un, certainly—all his manhood's in his legs, I believe. You see, he ain't a big sort o' chap at best, and he'd be pretty easy put upon—at least, I guess so.'

'Very good; so much the better; for then he won't have been damaged, and they will probably only have one man to guard him. Now the carriage, please.'

Young Kentish was a six-foot sergeant of Grenadiers, home on furlough, and luxuriating in plain clothes. He and Hewitt walked a little way towards the town, allowing the landau to catch them up. They travelled in it to within a hundred yards of the empty shops and then alighted, bidding the driver wait.

'I shall show you three empty shops,' Hewitt said, as he and young Kentish walked down Granville Road. 'I am pretty sure that Sammy Throckett is in one of them, and I am pretty sure that this is the middle one. Take a look as we go past.'

When the shops had been slowly passed, Hewitt resumed, 'Now, did you see anything about those shops that told a tale of any sort?'

'No,' Sergeant Kentish replied, 'I can't say I noticed anything beyond the fact that they were empty—and likely to stay so, I should think.'

'We'll stroll back, and look in at the windows, if nobody's watching us,' Hewitt said. 'You see, it's reasonable to suppose they've put him in the middle one, because that would suit their purpose best. The shops at each side of the three are occupied, and if the prisoner struggled, or shouted, or made an uproar, he might be heard if he were in one of the shops next those inhabited. So that the middle shop is the most likely. Now, see there,' he went on, as they stopped before the window of the shop in question, 'over at the back

there's a staircase not yet partitioned off. It goes down below and up above; on the stairs and on the floor near them there are muddy footmarks. These must have been made to-day, else they would not be muddy, but dry and dusty, since there hasn't been a shower for a week till to-day. Move on again. Then you notice that there are no other such marks in the shop. Consequently the man with the muddy feet did not come in by the front door, but by the back; otherwise he would have made a trail from the door. So we will go round to the back ourselves.'

It was now growing dusk. The small pieces of ground behind the shops were bounded by a low fence, containing a door for each house.

'This door is bolted inside, of course,' Hewitt said, 'but there is no difficulty in climbing. I think we had better wait in the garden till dark. In the meantime, the gaoler, whoever he is, may come out; in which case we shall pounce on him as soon as he opens the door. You have those few yards of cord in your pocket, I think? And my handkerchief, properly rolled, will make a very good gag. Now over.'

They climbed the fence, and quietly approached the house, placing themselves in the angle of an outhouse out of sight from the windows. There was no sound, and no light appeared. Just above the ground about a foot of window was visible, with a grating over it, apparently lighting a basement. Suddenly Hewitt touched his companion's arm, and pointed towards the window. A faint rustling sound was perceptible, and as nearly as could be discerned in the darkness, some white blind or covering was placed over the glass from the inside. Then came the sound of a striking match, and at the side edge of the window there was a faint streak of light.

'That's the place,' Hewitt whispered. 'Come, we'll make a push for it. You stand against the wall at one side of the

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door, and I'll stand at the other, and we'll have him as he comes out. Quietly, now, and I'll startle them.'

He took a stone from among the rubbish littering the garden, and flung it crashing through the window. There was a loud exclamation from within, the blind fell, and somebody rushed to the back door and flung it open. Instantly Kentish let fly a heavy right-hander, and the man went over like a skittle. In a moment Hewitt was upon him and the gag was in his mouth.

'Hold him,' Hewitt whispered hurriedly. 'I'll see if there are others.'

He peered down through the low window. Within, Sammy Throckett, his bare legs dangling from beneath his long overcoat, sat on a packing-box, leaning with his head on his hand and his back towards the window. A guttering candle stood on the mantelpiece, and the newspaper which had been stretched across the window lay in scattered sheets on the floor. No other person besides Sammy was visible.

They led their prisoner indoors. Young Kentish recognized him as a public-house loafer and race-course ruffian well known in the neighbourhood.

'So it's you, is it, Browdie?' he said. 'I've caught you one hard clump, and I've half a mind to make it a score more. But you'll get it pretty warm one way or another, before this job's forgotten.'

Sammy Throckett was overjoyed at his rescue. He had not been ill-treated, he explained, but had been thoroughly cowed by Browdie, who had from time to time threatened him savagely with an iron bar, by way of persuading him to quietness and submission. He had been fed, and had taken no worse harm from his adventure than a slight stiffness, due to his light under-attire of jersey and knee-shorts.

Sergeant Kentish tied Browdie's elbows firmly together behind, and carried the line round the ankles, bracing all up tight. Then he ran a knot from one wrist to the other over the back of the neck, and left the prisoner, trussed

and helpless, on the heap of straw that had been Sammy's bed.

'You won't be very jolly, I expect,' Kentish said, 'for some time. You can't shout, and you can't walk, and I know you can't untie yourself. You'll get a bit hungry, too, perhaps, but that'll give you an appetite. I don't suppose you'll be disturbed till some time to-morrow, unless our friend Danby turns up in the meantime. But you can come along to gaol instead, if you prefer it.'

They left him where he lay, and took Sammy to the old landau. Sammy walked in slippers, carrying his spiked shoes, hanging by the lace, in his hand.

'Ah,' said Hewitt, 'I think I know the name of the young lady who gave you those slippers.'

Throckett looked ashamed and indignant. 'Yes,' he said, 'they've done me nicely between 'em. But I'll pay her—I'll ...'

'Hush, hush!' Hewitt said, 'you mustn't talk unkindly of a lady, you know. Get into this carriage, and we'll take you home. We'll see if I can tell you your adventures without making a mistake. First, you had a note from Miss Webb, telling you that you were mistaken in supposing she had slighted you, and that as a matter of fact she had quite done with somebody else—left him—of whom you were jealous. Isn't that so?'

'Well, yes,' Throckett answered, blushing deeply under the carriage-lamp, 'but I don't see how you come to know that.'

'Then she went on to ask you to get rid of Steggles on Thursday afternoon for a few minutes, and speak to her in the back lane. Now, your running pumps, with their thin soles, almost like paper, no heels, and long spikes, hurt your feet horribly if you walk on hard ground, don't they?'

'Ay, that they do—enough to cripple you. I'd never go on much hard ground with 'em.'

'They're not like cricket shoes, I see '

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'Not a bit. Cricket shoes you can walk anywhere in.'

'Well, she knew this—I think I know who told her—and she promised to bring you a new pair of slippers, and to throw them over the fence for you to come out in.'

'I s'pose she's been tellin' you all this?' Throckett said mournfully. 'You couldn't ha' seen the letter—I saw her tear it up and put the bits in her pocket. She asked me for it in the lane, in case Steggles saw it.'

'Well, at any rate, you sent Steggles away, and the slippers did come over, and you went into the lane. You walked with her as far as the road at the end, and then you were seized and gagged, and put into a carriage.'

'That was Browdie did that,' said Throckett, 'and another chap I don't know. But—why, this is Padfield High Street!' He looked through the window and regarded the familiar shops with astonishment.

'Of course it is. Where did you think it was?'

'Why, where was that place you found me in?'

'Granville Road, Padfield. I suppose they told you you were in another town?'

'Told me it was Newstead Hatch. They drove for about three or four hours, and kept me down on the floor between the seats so as I couldn't see where we was going.'

'Done for two reasons,' said Hewitt. 'First, to mystify you, and prevent any discovery of the people directing the conspiracy, and, second, to be able to put you indoors at night and unobserved. Well, I think I have told you all you know yourself now as far as the carriage. But there is the 'Hare and Hounds' just in front. We'll pull up here and I'll get out and see if the coast is clear. I fancy Mr Kentish would rather you came in unnoticed.'

In a few seconds Hewitt was back, and Throckett was conveyed indoors by a side entrance. Hewitt's instructions to the landlord were few, but emphatic. 'Don't tell Steggles about it,' he said, 'make an excuse to get rid of him, and send him out of the house. Take Throckett into some other

bedroom, not his own, and let your son look after him. Then come here, and I'll tell you all about it.'

Sammy Throckett was undergoing a heavy grooming with white embrocation at the hands of Sergeant Kentish, when the landlord returned to Hewitt. 'Does Danby know you've got him?' he asked. 'How did you do it?'

'Danby doesn't know yet, and with luck he won't know till he sees Throckett running to-morrow. The man who has sold you is Steggles.'

'Steggles?'

'Steggles it is. At the very first, when Steggles rushed in to report Sammy Throckett missing, I suspected him. You didn't, I suppose?'

'No. He's always been considered a straight man, and he looked as startled as anybody.'

'Yes, I must say he acted it very well. But there was something suspicious in his story. What did he say? Throckett had remarked a chillness, and asked for a sweater, which Steggles went to fetch. Now just think. You understand these things. Would any trainer who knew his business (as Steggles does) have gone to bring out a sweater for his man to change for his jersey in the open air, at the very time the man was complaining of chilliness? Of course not. He would have taken his man indoors again and let him change there under shelter. Then supposing Steggles had really been surprised at missing Throckett, wouldn't he have looked about, found the gate open, and *told* you it was open, when he first came in? He said nothing of that—we found the gate open for ourselves. So that from the beginning I had a certain opinion of Steggles.'

'What you say seems pretty plain now, although it didn't strike me at the time. But if Steggles was selling us, why couldn't he have drugged the lad? That would have been a deal simpler.'

'Because Steggles is a good trainer, and has a certain reputation to keep up. It would have done him no good to

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have had a runner drugged while under his care—certainly it would have cooked his goose with *you*. It was much the safer thing to connive at kidnapping. That put all the active work into other hands, and left him safe, even if the trick failed. Now you remember that we traced the prints of Throckett's spiked shoes to within a couple of yards of the fence, and that there they ceased suddenly?'—

'Yes. You said it looked as though he had flown up into the air; and so it did.'

'But I was sure that it was by that gate that Throckett had left, and by no other. He couldn't have got through the house without being seen, and there was no other way—let alone the evidence of the unbolted gate. Therefore, as the footprints ceased where they did, and were not repeated anywhere in the lane, I knew that he had taken his spiked shoes off—probably changed them for something else, because a runner anxious as to his chances would never risk walking on bare feet, with a chance of cutting them. Ordinary, broad, smooth-soled slippers would leave no impression on the coarse cinders bordering the track, and nothing short of spiked shoes would leave a mark on the hard path in the lane behind. The spike tracks were leading, not directly toward the door, but in the direction of the fence, when they stopped—somebody had handed, or thrown, the slippers over the fence, and he had changed them on the spot. The enemy had calculated upon the spikes leaving a track in the lane that might lead us in our search, and had arranged accordingly.'

'So far, so good. I could see no footprints near the gate in the lane. You will remember, I sent Steggles off to fetch at the Cop before noticed' to the back—merely, of course, to get him with it was back. I went out into the lane, leaving you on its side entrained its whole length, first towards the O.K. a few, but even back towards the road. I found nothing to help me except these small pieces of paper—which are here in my pocket-book, by the bye. Of

course, this "mmy" might have meant "Jimmy" or "Tommy", as possibly as "Sammy", but they were not to be rejected on that account. Certainly Throckett had been decoyed out of your ground, not taken by force, or there would have been marks of a scuffle in the cinders. And as his request for a sweater was probably an excuse—because it was not at all a cold afternoon—he must have previously designed going out—inference, a letter received; and here were pieces of a letter. Now, in the light of what I have said, look at these pieces. First, there is the "mmy"—that I have dealt with. Then, see this "throw them ov"—clearly a part of "throw them over"; exactly what had probably been done with the slippers. Then the "poor f", coming just on the line before, and seen, by joining up with this other piece, might easily be a reference to "poor feet". These coincidences, one on the other, went far to establish the identity of the letter, and to confirm my previous impressions. But then there is something else. Two other pieces evidently mean "left him", and "right away"—send Steggles "right away", perhaps; but there is another, containing almost all of the words "hate his", with the word "hate" underlined. Now, who writes "hate" with the emphasis of underscoring—who but a woman? The writing is large, and not very regular; it might easily be that of a half-educated woman. Here was something more—Sammy had been enticed away by a woman.

'Now I remembered that when we went into the tap-room on Wednesday, some of his companions were chaffing Throckett about a certain Nancy Webb, and the chaff went home, as was plain to see. The woman, then, who could most easily entice Sammy Throckett away was Nancy Webb. I resolved to find who Nancy Webb was and learn more of her.

'Meantime I took a look at the road at the end of the lane. It was damper than the lane, being lower, and overhung by trees. There were many wheel tracks, but only

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one set that turned in the road and went back the way it came—towards the town—and they were narrow wheels, carriage wheels. Throckett tells me now that they drove him about for a long time before shutting him up—probably the inconvenience of taking him straight to the hiding-place didn't strike them when they first drove off.

'A few inquiries soon set me in the direction of the "Plough" and Miss Nancy Webb. I had the curiosity to look round the place as I approached, and there, in the garden behind the house, were Steggles and the young lady in earnest confabulation!

'Every conjecture became a certainty. Steggles was the lover of whom Throckett was jealous, and he had employed the girl to bring Sammy out. I watched Steggles home, and gave you a hint to keep him there.

'But the thing that remained was to find Steggles's employer in this business. I was glad to be in when Danby called—he came, of course, to hear if you would blurt out anything, and to learn, if possible, what steps you were taking. He failed. By way of making assurance doubly sure, I took a short walk this morning in the character of a deaf gentleman, and got Miss Webb to write me a direction that comprised three of the words on these scraps of paper—"left", "right", and "lane"—see, they correspond, the peculiar "f's," "t's," and all.

'Now, I felt perfectly sure that Steggles would go for his pay to-day. In the first place, I knew that people mixed up with shady transactions in professional pedestrianism are not apt to trust one another far—they know better. Therefore, Steggles wouldn't have had his bribe first. But he would take care to get it before the Saturday heats were run, because once they were over the thing was done, and the principal conspirator might have refused to pay up, and Steggles couldn't have helped himself. Again I hinted he should not go out till I could follow him, and this afternoon when he went, follow him I did. I saw him go into

Danby's house by the side way and come away again. Danby it was, then, who had arranged the business; and nobody was more likely, considering his large pecuniary stake against Throckett's winning this race.

'But now, how to find Throckett? I made up my mind he wouldn't be in Danby's own house—that would be a deal too risky, with servants about, and so on. I saw that Danby was a buidler, and had three shops to let—it was on a paper before his house. What more likely prison than an empty house? I knocked at Danby's door, and asked for the keys of those shops. I couldn't have them. The servant told me Danby was out (a manifest lie, for I had just seen him), and that nobody could see the shops till Monday. But I got out of her where the shops lay, and that was all I wanted at the time.

'Now, why was nobody to see those shops till Monday? The interval was suspicious—just enough to enable Throckett to be sent away again and cast loose after the Saturday racing, supposing him to be kept in one of the empty buildings. I went off at once and looked at the shops, forming my conclusions as to which would be the most likely for Danby's purpose. Here I had another confirmation of my ideas. A poor, half-bankrupt baker in one of the shops had, by the bills, the custody of a set of keys; but *he*, too, told me I couldn't have them, Danby had taken them away—and on Thursday, the very day—with some trivial excuse, and hadn't brought them back. That was all I wanted, or could expect in the way of guidance; the whole thing was plain. The rest you know all about.'

'Well, you're certainly as smart as they give you credit for, I must say. But suppose Danby had taken down his "to let" notice, what would you have done then?'

'We had our course, even then. We should have gone to Danby, astounded him by telling him all about his little games, terrorized him with threats of the law, and made him throw up his hand and send Throckett back. But as it

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is, you see, he doesn't know at this moment—probably won't know till to-morrow afternoon—that the lad is safe and sound here. You will probably use the interval to make him pay for posing the game—by some of the ingenious financial devices you are no doubt familiar with.'

'Aye, that I will. He'll give any price against Throckett now, so long as the bet don't come direct from me.'

'But about Throckett, now,' Hewitt went on. 'Won't this confinement be likely to have damaged his speed for a day or two?'

'Ah, perhaps,' the landlord replied; 'but, bless ye, that won't matter. There's four more in his heat to-morrow. Two I know aren't tryers, and the other two I can hold in at a couple of quid apiece any day. The third round and the final won't be till to-morrow week, and he'll be as fit as ever by then. It's as safe as ever it was. How much are you going to have on? I'll lump it on for you safe enough. This is a chance not to be missed—it's picking money up.'

'Thank you; I don't think I'll have anything to do with it. This professional pedestrian business doesn't seem a pretty one at all. I don't call myself a moralist, but, if you'll excuse my saying so, the thing is scarcely the game I care to pick up money at in any way.'

'Oh! very well, if you think so, I won't persuade ye, though I don't think so much of your smartness as I did, after that. Still, we won't quarrel—you've done me a mighty good turn, that I must say, and I only feel I aren't level without doing something to pay the debt. Come, now, you've got your trade as I've got mine. Let me have the bill, and I'll pay it like a lord, and feel a deal more pleased than if you made a favour of it—not that I'm above a favour, of course. But I'd prefer paying, and that's a fact.'

'My dear sir, you have paid,' Hewitt said, with a smile. 'You paid in advance. It was a bargain, wasn't it, that I should do your business if you would help me in mine? Very well, a bargain's a bargain, and we've both performed

our parts. And you mustn't be offended at what I said just now.'

'That I won't. But as to that Raggy Steggles, once those heats are over to-morrow, I'll—well . . !'

* * *

It was on the following Sunday week that Martin Hewitt, in his rooms in London, turned over his *Referee* and read, under the head, 'Padfield Annual 135 Yards Handicap', this announcement: 'Final Heat: Throckett, first; Willis, second; Trewby, third; Owen, 0; Howell, 0. A runaway win by nearly three yards.'

III

The Problem of Dead Wood Hall

Dick Donovan

‘MYSTERIOUS CASE IN CHESHIRE’. So ran the heading to a paragraph in all the morning papers some years ago, and prominence was given to the following particulars:

A gentleman, bearing the somewhat curious name of Tuscan Trankler, resided in a picturesque old mansion, known as Dead Wood Hall, situated in one of the most beautiful and lonely parts of Cheshire, not very far from the quaint and old-time village of Knutsford. Mr Trankler had given a dinner-party at his house, and amongst the guests was a very well-known county magistrate and land-owner, Mr Manville Charnworth. It appeared that, soon after the ladies had retired from the table, Mr Charnworth rose and went into the grounds, saying he wanted a little air. He was smoking a cigar, and in the enjoyment of perfect health. He had drunk wine, however, rather freely, as was his wont, but though on exceedingly good terms with himself and every one else, he was perfectly sober. An hour passed, but Mr Charnworth had not returned to the table. Though this did not arouse any alarm, as it was thought

that he had probably joined the ladies, for he was what is called 'a ladies' man,' and preferred the company of females to that of men. A tremendous sensation, however, was caused when, a little later, it was announced that Charnworth had been found insensible, lying on his back in a shrubbery. Medical assistance was at once summoned, and when it arrived the opinion expressed was that the unfortunate gentleman had been stricken with apoplexy. For some reason or other, however, the doctors were led to modify that view, for symptoms were observed which pointed to what was thought to be a peculiar form of poisoning, although the poison could not be determined. After a time, Charnworth recovered consciousness, but was quite unable to give any information. He seemed to be dazed and confused, and was evidently suffering great pain. At last his limbs began to swell, and swelled to an enormous size; his eyes sunk, his cheeks fell in, his lips turned black, and mortification appeared in the extremities. Everything that could be done for the unfortunate man was done, but without avail. After six hours' suffering, he died in a paroxysm of raving madness, during which he had to be held down in the bed by several strong men.

The post-mortem examination, which was necessarily held, revealed the curious fact that the blood in the body had become thin and purplish, with a faint strange odour that could not be identified. All the organs were extremely congested, and the flesh presented every appearance of rapid decomposition. In fact, twelve hours after death putrefaction had taken place. The medical gentlemen who had the case in hand were greatly puzzled, and were at a loss to determine the precise cause of death. The deceased had been a very healthy man, and there was no actual organic disease of any kind. In short, everything pointed to poisoning. It was noted that on the left side of the neck was a tiny scratch, with a slightly livid appearance, such as might have been made by a small sharply pointed instru-

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ment. The viscera having been secured for purposes of analysis, the body was hurriedly buried within thirty hours of death.

The result of the analysis was to make clear that the unfortunate gentleman had died through some very powerful and irritant poison being introduced into the blood. That it was a case of blood-poisoning there was hardly room for the shadow of a doubt, but the science of that day was quite unable to say what the poison was, or how it had got into the body. There was no reason—so far as could be ascertained—to suspect foul play, and even less reason to suspect suicide. Altogether, therefore, the case was one of profound mystery, and the coroner's jury were compelled to return an open verdict. Such were the details that were made public at the time of Mr Charnworth's death; and from the social position of all the parties, the affair was something more than a nine days' wonder; while in Cheshire itself, it created a profound sensation. But, as no further information was forthcoming, the matter ceased to interest the outside world, and so, as far as the public were concerned, it was relegated to the limbo of forgotten things.

Two years later, Mr Ferdinand Trankler, eldest son of Tuscan Trankler, accompanied a large party of friends for a day's shooting in Mere Forest. He was a young man, about five and twenty years of age; was in the most perfect health, and had scarcely ever had a day's illness in his life. Deservedly popular and beloved, he had a large circle of warm friends, and was about to be married to a charming young lady, a member of an old Cheshire family who were extensive landed proprietors and property owners. His prospects therefore seemed to be unclouded, and his happiness complete.

The shooting-party was divided into three sections, each agreeing to shoot over a different part of the forest, and to meet in the afternoon for refreshments at an appointed rendezvous.

Young Trankler and his companions kept pretty well together for some little time, but ultimately began to spread about a good deal. At the appointed hour the friends all met, with the exception of Trankler. He was not there. His absence did not cause any alarm, as it was thought he he would soon turn up. He was known to be well acquainted with the forest, and the supposition was he had strayed further afield than the rest. By the time the repast was finished, however, he had not put in an appearance. Then, for the first time, the company began to feel some uneasiness, and vague hints that possibly an accident had happened were thrown out. Hints at last took the form of definite expressions of alarm, and search parties were at once organized to go in search of the absent young man, for only on the hypothesis of some untoward event could his prolonged absence be accounted for, inasmuch as it was not deemed in the least likely that he would show such a lack of courtesy as to go off and leave his friends without a word of explanation. For two hours the search was kept up without any result. Darkness was then closing in, and the now painfully anxious searchers began to feel that they would have to desist until daylight returned. But at last some of the more energetic and active members of the party came upon Trankler lying on his side, and nearly entirely hidden by masses of half withered bracken. He was lying near a little stream that meandered through the forest, and near a keeper's shelter that was constructed with logs and thatched with pine boughs. He was stone dead, and his appearance caused his friends to shrink back with horror, for he was not only black in the face, but his body was bloated, and his limbs seemed swollen to twice their natural size.

Amongst the party were two medical men, who, being hastily summoned, proceeded at once to make an examination. They expressed an opinion that the young man had been dead for some time, but they could not account for his death, as there was no wound to be observed. As a matter of

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fact, his gun was lying near him with both barrels loaded. Moreover, his appearance was not compatible at all with death from a gun-shot wound. How then had he died? The consternation amongst those who had known him can well be imagined, and with a sense of suppressed horror, it was whispered that the strange condition of the dead man coincided with that of Mr Manville Charnworth, the county magistrate who had died so mysteriously two years previously.

As soon as it was possible to do so, Ferdinand Trankler's body was removed to Dead Wood Hall, and his people were stricken with profound grief when they realized that the hope and joy of their house was dead. Of course an autopsy had to be performed, owing to the ignorance of the medical men as to the cause of death. And this post-mortem examination disclosed the fact that all the extraordinary appearances which had been noticed in Mr Charnworth's case were present in this one. There was the same purplish coloured blood; the same gangrenous condition of the limbs; but as with Charnworth, so with Trankler, all the organs were healthy. There was no organic disease to account for death. As it was pretty certain, therefore, that death was not due to natural causes, a coroner's inquest was held, and while the medical evidence made it unmistakably clear that young Trankler had been cut down in the flower of his youth and while he was in radiant health by some powerful and potent means which had suddenly destroyed his life, no one had the boldness to suggest what those means were, beyond saying that blood poisoning of a most violent character had been set up. Now, it was very obvious that blood-poisoning could not have originated without some specific cause, and the most patient investigation was directed to trying to find out the cause, while exhaustive inquiries were made, but at the end of them, the solution of the mystery was as far off as ever, for these investigations had been in the wrong channel, not one

scrap of evidence was brought forward which would have justified a definite statement that this or that had been responsible for the young man's death.

It was remembered that when the post-mortem examination of Mr Charnworth took place, a tiny bluish scratch was observed on the left side of the neck. But it was so small, and apparently so unimportant that it was not taken into consideration when attempts were made to solve the problem of 'How did the man die?' When the doctors examined Mr Trankler's body, they looked to see if there was a similar puncture or scratch, and, to their astonishment, they did find rather a curious mark on the left side of the neck, just under the ear. It was a slight abrasion of the skin, about an inch long as if he had been scratched with a pin, and this abrasion was a faint blue, approximating in colour to the tattoo marks on a sailor's arm. The similarity in this scratch to that which had been observed on Mr Charnworth's body, necessarily gave rise to a good deal of comment amongst the doctors, though they could not arrive at any definite conclusion respecting it. One man went so far as to express an opinion that it was due to an insect or the bite of a snake. But this theory found no supporters, for it was argued that the similar wound on Mr Charnworth could hardly have resulted from an insect or snake bite, for he had died in his friend's garden. Besides, there was no insect or snake in England capable of killing a man as these two men had been killed. That theory, therefore, fell to the ground, and medical science as represented by the local gentlemen had to confess itself baffled; while the coroner's jury were forced to again return an open verdict.

'There was no evidence to prove how the deceased had come by his death'

This verdict was considered highly unsatisfactory, but what other could have been returned. There was nothing to support the theory of foul play; on the other hand, no

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evidence was forthcoming to explain away the mystery which surrounded the deaths of Charnworth and Trankler. The two men had apparently died from precisely the same cause, and under circumstances which were as mysterious as they were startling, but what the cause was, no one seemed able to determine.

Universal sympathy was felt with the friends and relatives of young Trankler, who had perished so unaccountably while in pursuit of pleasure. Had he been taken suddenly ill at home and had died in his bed, even though the same symptoms and morbid appearances had manifested themselves, the mystery would not have been so great. But as Charnworth's end came in his host's garden after a dinner-party, so young Trankler died in a forest while he and his friends were engaged in shooting. There was certainly something truly remarkable that two men, exhibiting all the same post-mortem effects, should have died in such a way; their deaths, in point of time, being separated by a period of two years. On the face of it, it seemed impossible that it could be merely a coincidence. It will be gathered from the foregoing, that in this double tragedy were all the elements of a romance well calculated to stimulate public curiosity to the highest pitch; while the friends and relatives of the two deceased gentlemen were of opinion that the matter ought not to be allowed to drop with the return of the verdict of the coroner's jury. An investigation seemed to be urgently called for. Of course, an investigation of a kind had taken place by the local police, but something more than that was required, so thought the friends. And an application was made to me to go down to Dead Wood Hall; and bring such skill as I possessed to bear on the case, in the hope that the veil of mystery might be drawn aside, and light let in where all was then dark.

Dead Wood Hall was a curious place, with a certain gloominess of aspect which seemed to suggest that it was a fitting scene for a tragedy. It was a large, massive house,

heavily timbered in front in a way peculiar to many of the old Cheshire mansions. It stood in extensive grounds, and being situated on a rise commanded a very fine panoramic view which embraced the Derbyshire Hills. How it got its name of Dead Wood Hall no one seemed to know exactly. There was a tradition that it had originally been known as Dark Wood Hall; but the word 'Dark' had been corrupted into 'Dead'. The Tranklers came into possession of the property by purchase, and the family had been the owners of it for something like thirty years.

With great circumstantiality I was told the story of the death of each man, together with the results of the post-mortem examination, and the steps that had been taken by the police. On further inquiry I found that the police, in spite of the mystery surrounding the case, were firmly of opinion that the deaths of the two men were, after all, due to natural causes, and that the similarity in the appearance of the bodies after death *was* a mere coincidence. The superintendent of the county constabulary, who had had charge of the matter, waxed rather warm; for he said that all sorts of ridiculous stories had been set afloat, and absurd theories had been suggested, not one of which would have done credit to the intelligence of an average schoolboy.

'People lose their heads so, and make such fools of themselves in matters of this kind,' he said warmly; 'and of course the police are accused of being stupid, ignorant, and all the rest of it. They seem, in fact, to have a notion that we are endowed with superhuman faculties, and that nothing should baffle us. But, as a matter of fact, it is the doctors who are at fault in this instance. They are confronted with a new disease, about which they are ignorant; and, in order to conceal their want of knowledge, they at once raise the cry of "foul play".'

'Then you are clearly of opinion that Mr Charnworth and Mr Trankler died of a disease,' I remarked.

'Undoubtedly I am.'

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'Then how do you explain the rapidity of the death in each case, and the similarity in the appearance of the dead bodies?'

'It isn't for me to explain that at all. That is doctors' work not police work. If the doctors can't explain it, how can I be expected to do so? I only know this, I've put some of my best men on to the job, and they've failed to find anything that would suggest foul play.'

'And that convinces you absolutely that there has been no foul play?'

'Absolutely.'

'I suppose you were personally acquainted with both gentlemen? What sort of man was Mr Charnworth?'

'Oh, well, he was right enough, as such men go. He made a good many blunders as a magistrate; but all magistrates do that. You see, fellows get put on the bench who are no more fit to be magistrates than you are, sir. It's a matter of influence more often as not. Mr Charnworth was no worse and no better than a lot of others I could name.'

'What opinion did you form of his private character?'

'Ah, now, there, there's another matter,' answered the superintendent, in a confidential tone, and with a smile playing about his lips. 'You see, Mr Charnworth was a bachelor.'

'So are thousands of other men,' I answered. 'But bachelorhood is not considered dishonourable in this country.'

'No, perhaps not. But they say as how the reason was that Mr Charnworth didn't get married was because he didn't care for having only one wife.'

'You mean he was fond of ladies, generally. A sort of general lover.'

'I should think he was,' said the superintendent, with a twinkle in his eye, which was meant to convey a good deal of meaning. 'I've heard some queer stories about him.'

‘What is the nature of the stories?’ I asked, thinking that I might get something to guide me.

‘Oh, well, I don’t attach much importance to them myself,’ he said, half-apologetically; ‘but the fact is, there was some social scandal talked about Mr Charnworth.’

‘What was the nature of the scandal?’

‘Mind you,’ urged the superintendent, evidently anxious to be freed from any responsibility for the scandal whatever it was, ‘I only tell you the story as I heard it. Mr Charnworth liked his little flirtations, no doubt, as we all do; but he was a gentleman and a magistrate, and I have no right to say anything against him that I know nothing about myself.’

‘While a gentleman may be a magistrate, a magistrate is not always a gentleman,’ I remarked.

‘True, true, but Mr Charnworth was. He was a fine specimen of a gentleman, and was very liberal. He did me many kindnesses.’

‘Therefore, in your sight, at least, sir, he was without blemish.’

‘I don’t go as far as that,’ replied the superintendent, a little warmly; ‘I only want to be just.’

‘I give you full credit for that,’ I answered, ‘but please do tell me about the scandal you spoke of. It is just possible it may afford me a clue.’

‘I don’t think that it will. However, here is the story. A young lady lived in Knutsford by the name of Downie. She is the daughter of the late George Downie, who for many years carried on the business of a miller. Hester Downie was said to be one of the prettiest girls in Cheshire, or, at any rate, in this part of Cheshire, and rumour has it that she flirted with both Charnworth and Trankler.’

‘Is that all that rumour says?’ I asked.

‘No, there was a good deal more said. But, as I have told you, I know nothing for certain, and so must decline to

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commit myself to any statement for which there could be no better foundation than common gossip.'

'Does Miss Downie still live in Knutsford?'

'No; she disappeared mysteriously soon after Charnworth's death.'

'And you don't know where she is?'

'No; I have no idea.'

As I did not see that there was much more to be gained from the superintendent I left him, and at once sought an interview with the leading medical man who had made the autopsy of the two bodies. He was a man who was somewhat puffed up with the belief in his own cleverness, but he gave me the impression that, if anything, he was a little below the average country practitioner. He hadn't a single theory to advance to account for the deaths of Charnworth and Trankler. He confessed that he was mystified; that all the appearances were entirely new to him, for neither in his reading nor his practice had he ever heard of a similar case.

'Are you disposed to think, sir, that these two men came to their end by foul play?' I asked.

'No, I am not,' he answered definitely, 'and I said so at the inquest. Foul play means murder, cool and deliberate, and planned and carried out with fiendish cunning. Besides, if it was murder how was the murder committed?'

'*If it was murder?*' I asked significantly. 'I shall hope to answer that question later on.'

'But I am convinced it wasn't murder,' returned the doctor, with a self-confident air. 'If a man is shot, or bludgeoned, or poisoned, there is something to go upon. I scarcely know of a poison that cannot be detected. And not a trace of poison was found in the organs of either man. Science has made tremendous strides of late years, and I doubt if she has much more to teach us in that respect. Anyway, I assert without fear of contradiction that Charnworth and Trankler did not die of poison.'

'What killed them, then?' I asked, bluntly and sharply.

The doctor did not like the question, and there was a roughness in his tone as he answered—

‘I’m not prepared to say. If I could have assigned a precise cause of death the coroner’s verdict would have been different.’

‘Then you admit that the whole affair is a problem which you are incapable of solving?’

‘Frankly, I do,’ he answered, after a pause. ‘There are certain peculiarities in the case that I should like to see cleared up. In fact, in the interests of my profession, I think it is most desirable that the mystery surrounding the death of the unfortunate men should be solved. And I have been trying experiments recently with a view to attaining that end, though without success.’

My interview with this gentleman had not advanced matters, for it only served to show me that the doctors were quite baffled, and I confess that that did not altogether encourage me. Where they had failed, how could I hope to succeed? They had the advantage of seeing the bodies and examining them, and though they found themselves confronted with signs which were in themselves significant, they could not read them. All that I had to go upon was hearsay, and I was asked to solve a mystery which seemed unsolvable. But, as I have so often stated in the course of my chronicles, the seemingly impossible is frequently the most easy to accomplish, where a mind specially trained to deal with complex problems is brought to bear upon it.

In interviewing Mr Tuscan Trankler, I found that he entertained a very decided opinion that there had been foul play, though he admitted that it was difficult in the extreme to suggest even a vague notion of how the deed had been accomplished. If the two men had died together or within a short period of each other, the idea of murder would have seemed more logical. But two years had elapsed, and yet each man had evidently died from precisely the same cause. Therefore, if it *was* murder, the same hand that

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had slain Mr Charnworth slew Mr Trankler. There was no getting away from that; and then of course arose the question of *motive*. Granted that the same hand did the deed, did the same motive prompt in each case? Another aspect of the affair that presented itself to me was that the crime, if crime it was, was not the work of any ordinary person. There was an originality of conception in it which pointed to the criminal being, in certain respects, a genius. And, moreover, the motive underlying it must have been a very powerful one; possibly, nay probably, due to a sense of some terrible wrong inflicted, and which could only be wiped out with the death of the wronger. But this presupposed that each man, though unrelated, had perpetrated the same wrong. Now, it was within the grasp of intelligent reasoning that Charnworth, in his capacity of a county justice, might have given mortal offence to some one, who, cherishing the memory of it, until a mania had been set up, resolved that the magistrate should die. That theory was reasonable when taken singly, but it seemed to lose its reasonableness when connected with young Trankler, unless it was that he had been instrumental in getting somebody convicted. To determine this I made very pointed inquiries, but received the most positive assurances that never in the whole course of his life had he directly or indirectly been instrumental in prosecuting any one. Therefore, so far as he was concerned, the theory fell to the ground; and if the same person killed both men, the motive prompting in each case was a different one, assuming that Charnworth's death resulted from revenge for a fancied wrong inflicted in the course of his administration of justice.

Although I fully recognized all the difficulties that lay in the way of a rational deduction that would square in with the theory of murder, and of murder committed by one and the same hand, I saw how necessary it was to keep in view the points I have advanced as factors in the problem that had to be worked out, and I adhered to my first

impression, and felt tolerably certain that, granted the men had been murdered, they were murdered by the same hand. It may be said that this deduction required no great mental effort I admit that that is so, but it is strange that nearly all the people in the district were opposed to the theory. Mr Tuscan Trankler spoke very highly of Charnworth. He believed him to be an upright, conscientious man, liberal to a fault with his means, and in his position of magistrate erring on the side of mercy. In his private character he was a *bon vivant*, fond of a good dinner, good wine, and good company. He was much in request at dinner-parties and other social gatherings, for he was accounted a brilliant *raconteur*, possessed of an endless fund of racy jokes and anecdotes. I have already stated that with ladies he was an especial favourite, for he had a singularly suave, winning way, which with most women was irresistible. In age he was more than double that of young Trankler, who was only five and twenty at the time of his death, whereas Charnworth had turned sixty, though I was given to understand that he was a well-preserved, good-looking man, and apparently younger than he really was.

Coming to young Trankler, there was a consensus of opinion that he was an exemplary young man. He had been partly educated at home and partly at the Manchester Grammar School; and, though he had shown a decided talent for engineering, he had not gone in for it seriously, but had dabbled in it as an amateur, for he had ample means and good prospects, and it was his father's desire that he should lead the life of a country gentleman, devote himself to country pursuits, and to improving and keeping together the family estates. To the lady who was to have become his bride, he had been engaged but six months, and had only known her a year. His premature and mysterious death had caused intense grief in both families, and his intended wife had been so seriously affected that her friends had been compelled to take her abroad

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With these facts and particulars before me, I had to set to work and try to solve the problem which was considered unsolvable by most of the people who knew anything about it. But may I be pardoned for saying very positively that, even at this point, I did not consider it so. Its complexity could not be gainsaid; nevertheless, I felt that there were ways and means of arriving at a solution, and I set to work in my own fashion. Firstly, I started on the assumption that both men had been deliberately murdered by the same person. If that was not so, then they had died of some remarkable and unknown disease which had stricken them down under a set of conditions that were closely allied, and the coincidence in that case would be one of the most astounding the world had ever known. Now, if that was correct, a pathological conundrum was propounded which it was for the medical world to answer, and practically I was placed out of the running, to use a sporting phrase. I found that, with few exceptions—the exceptions being Mr Trankler and his friends—there was an undisguised opinion that what the united local wisdom and skill had failed to accomplish, could not be accomplished by a stranger. As my experience, however, had inured me against that sort of thing, it did not affect me. Local prejudices and jealousies have always to be reckoned with, and it does not do to be thin-skinned. I worked upon my own lines, thought with my own thoughts, and, as an expert in the art of reading human nature, I reasoned from a different set of premises to that employed by the irresponsible chatterers, who cry out ‘Impossible’, as soon as the first difficulty presents itself. Marshalling all the facts of the case so far as I had been able to gather them, I arrived at the conclusion that the problem could be solved, and, as a preliminary step to that end, I started off to London, much to the astonishment of those who had secured my services. But my reply to the many queries addressed to me was, ‘I hope to find the key-note to the

solution in the metropolis.' This reply only increased the astonishment, but later on I will explain why I took the step, which may seem to the reader rather an extraordinary one.

After an absence of five days I returned to Cheshire, and I was then in a position to say, 'Unless a miracle has happened, Charnworth and Trankler were murdered beyond all doubt, and murdered by the same person in such a cunning, novel, and devilish manner, that even the most astute inquirer might have been pardoned for being baffled.' Of course there was a strong desire to know my reasons for the positive statement, but I felt that it was in the interests of justice itself that I should not allow them to be known at that stage of the proceedings.

The next important step was to try and find out what had become of Miss Downie, the Knutsford beauty, with whom Charnworth was said to have carried on a flirtation. Here, again, I considered secrecy of great importance.

Hester Downie was about seven and twenty years of age. She was an orphan, and was believed to have been born in Macclesfield, as her parents came from there. Her father's calling was that of a miller. He had settled in Knutsford about fifteen years previous to the period I am dealing with, and had been dead about five years. Not very much was known about the family, but it was thought there were other children living. No very kindly feeling was shown for Hester Downie, though it was only too obvious that jealousy was at the bottom of it. Half the young men, it seemed, had lost their heads about her, and all the girls in the village were consumed with envy and jealousy. It was said she was 'stuck up', 'above her position', 'a heartless flirt', and so forth. From those competent to speak, however, she was regarded as a nice young woman, and admittedly good-looking. For years she had lived with an old aunt, who bore the reputation of being rather a sullen sort of woman, and somewhat eccentric. The girl had a little

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over fifty pounds a year to live upon, derived from a small property left to her by her father; and she and her aunt occupied a cottage just on the outskirts of Knutsford. Hester was considered to be very exclusive, and did not associate much with the people in Knutsford. This was sufficient to account for the local bias, and as she often went away from her home for three and four weeks at a time, it was not considered extraordinary when it was known that she had left soon after Trankler's death. Nobody, however, knew where she had gone to; it is right, perhaps, that I should here state that not a soul breathed a syllable of suspicion against her, that either directly or indirectly she could be connected with the deaths of Charnworth or Trankler. The aunt, a widow by the name of Hislop, could not be described as a pleasant or genial woman, either in appearance or manner. I was anxious to ascertain for certain whether there was any truth in the rumour or not that Miss Downie had flirted with Mr Charnworth. If it was true that she did, a clue might be afforded which would lead to the ultimate unravelling of the mystery. I had to approach Mrs Hislop with a good deal of circumspection, for she showed an inclination to resent any inquiries being made into her family matters. She gave me the impression that she was an honest woman, and it was very apparent that she was strongly attached to her niece Hester. Trading on this fact, I managed to draw her out. I said that people in the district were beginning to say unkind things about Hester, and that it would be better for the girl's sake that there should be no mystery associated with her or her movements.

The old lady fired up at this, and declared that she didn't care a jot about what the 'common people' said. Her niece was superior to all of them, and she would 'have the law on any one who spoke ill of Hester.'

'But there is one thing, Mrs Hislop,' I replied, 'that ought to be set at rest. It is rumoured—in fact, something

more than rumoured—that your niece and the late Mr Charnworth were on terms of intimacy, which, to say the least, if it is true, was imprudent for a girl in her position.’

‘Them what told you that,’ exclaimed the old woman, ‘is like the adders the woodmen get in Delamere forest: they’re full of poison. Mr Charnworth courted the girl fair and square, and led her to believe he would marry her. But, of course, he had to do the thing in secret. Some folk will talk so, and if it had been known that a gentleman like Mr Charnworth was coming after a girl in Hester’s position, all sorts of things would have been said.’

‘Did she believe that he was serious in his intentions towards her?’

‘Of course she did.’

‘Why was the match broken off?’

‘Because he died.’

‘Then do you mean to tell me seriously, Mrs Hislop, that Mr Charnworth, had he lived, would have married your niece?’

‘Yes, I believe he would.’

‘Was he the only lover the girl had?’

‘Oh dear no. She used to carry on with a man named Job Panton. But, though they were engaged to be married, she didn’t like him much, and threw him up for Mr Charnworth.’

‘Did she ever flirt with young Mr Trankler?’

‘I don’t know about flirting; but he called here now and again, and made her some presents. You see, Hester is a superior sort of girl, and I don’t wonder at gentlefolk liking her.’

‘Just so,’ I replied; ‘beauty attracts peasant and lord alike. But you will understand that it is to Hester’s interest that there should be no concealment—no mystery; and I advise that she return here, for her very presence would tend to silence the tongue of scandal. By the way, where is she?’

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'She's staying in Manchester with a relative, a cousin of hers, named Jessie Turner.'

'Is Jessie Turner a married woman?'

'Oh yes: well, that is, she has been married; but she's a widow now, and has two little children. She is very fond of Hester, who often goes to her.'

Having obtained Jessie Turner's address in Manchester, I left Mrs Hislop, feeling somehow as if I had got the key of the problem, and a day or two later I called on Mrs Jessie Turner, who resided in a small house, situated in Tamworth Street, Hulme, Manchester.

She was a young woman, not more than thirty years of age, somewhat coarse, and vulgar-looking in appearance, and with an unpleasant, self-assertive manner. There was a great contrast between her and her cousin, Hester Downie, who was a remarkably attractive and pretty girl, with quite a classical figure, and a childish, winning way, but a painful want of education which made itself very manifest when she spoke; and a harsh, unmusical voice detracted a good deal from her winsomeness, while in everything she did, and almost everything she said, she revealed that vanity was her besetting sin.

I formed my estimate at once of this young woman—indeed, of both of them. Hester seemed to me to be shallow, vain, thoughtless, giddy; and her companion, artful, cunning, and heartless.

'I want you, Miss Downie,' I began, 'to tell me truthfully the story of your connection, firstly, with Job Panton, secondly, with Mr Charnworth; thirdly, with Mr Trankler.'

This request caused the girl to fall into a condition of amazement and confusion, for I had not stated what the nature of my business was, and, of course, she was unprepared for the question.

'What should I tell you my business for?' she cried snappishly, and growing very red in the face.

'You are aware,' I remarked, 'that both Mr Charnworth and Mr Trankler are dead?'

'Of course I am.'

'Have you any idea how they came by their death?'

'Not the slightest.'

'Will you be surprised to hear that some very hard things are being said about you?'

'About me!' she exclaimed, in amazement.

'Yes.'

'Why about me?'

'Well, your disappearance from your home, for one thing.'

She threw up her hands and uttered a cry of distress and horror, while sudden paleness took the place of the red flush that had dyed her cheeks. Then she burst into almost hysterical weeping, and sobbed out:

'I declare it's awful. To think that I cannot do anything or go away when I like without all the old cats in the place trying to blacken my character! It's a pity that people won't mind their own business, and not go out of the way to talk about that which doesn't concern them.'

'But, you see, Miss Downie, it's the way of the world,' I answered, with a desire to soothe her; 'one mustn't be too thin-skinned. Human nature is essentially spiteful. However, to return to the subject, you will see, perhaps, the importance of answering my questions. The circumstances of Charnworth's and Trankler's deaths are being closely inquired into, and I am sure you wouldn't like it to be thought that you were withholding information which, in the interest of law and justice, might be valuable.'

'Certainly not,' she replied, suppressing a sob. 'But I have nothing to tell you.'

'But you knew the three men I have mentioned.'

'Of course I did, but Job Pantton is an ass. I never could bear him.'

'He was your sweetheart, though, was he not?'

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'He used to come fooling about, and declared that he couldn't live without me.'

'Did you never give him encouragement?'

'I suppose every girl makes a fool of herself sometimes.'

'Then you did allow him to sweetheart you?'

'If you like to call it sweethearting you can,' she answered, with a toss of her pretty head. 'I did walk out with him sometimes. But I didn't care much for him. You see, he wasn't my sort at all.'

'In what way?'

'Well, surely I couldn't be expected to marry a game-keeper, could I?'

'He is a gamekeeper, then?'

'Yes.'

'In whose employ is he?'

'Lord Belmere's.'

'Was he much disappointed when he found that you would have nothing to do with him?'

'I really don't know. I didn't trouble myself about him,' she answered, with a coquettish heartlessness.

'Did you do any sweethearting with Mr Trankler?'

'No, of course not. He used to be very civil to me, and talk to me when he met me.'

'Did you ever walk out with him?'

The question brought the colour back to her face, and her manner grew confused again.

'Once or twice I met him by accident, and he strolled along the road with me—that's all.'

This answer was not a truthful one. Of that I was convinced by her very manner. But I did not betray my mistrust or doubts. I did not think there was any purpose to be served in so doing. So far the object of my visit was accomplished, and as Miss Downie seemed disposed to resent any further questioning, I thought it was advisable to bring the interview to a close, but before doing so, I said:

'I have one more question to ask you, Miss Downie.'

Permit me to preface it, however, by saying I am afraid that, up to this point, you have failed to appreciate the situation, or grasp the seriousness of the position in which you are placed. Let me, therefore, put it before you in a somewhat more graphic way. Two men—gentlemen of good social position—with whom you seem to have been well acquainted, and whose attentions you encouraged—pray do not look at me so angrily as that; I mean what I say. I repeat that you encouraged their attentions, otherwise they would not have gone after you.’ Here Miss Downie’s nerves gave way again, and she broke into a fit of weeping, and, holding her handkerchief to her eyes, she exclaimed with almost passionate bitterness:

‘Well, whatever I did, I was egged on to do it by my cousin, Jessie Turner. She always said I was a fool not to aim at high game.’

‘And so you followed her promptings, and really thought that you might have made a match with Mr Charnworth; but, he having died, you turned your thoughts to young Trankler.’ She did not reply, but sobbed behind her handkerchief. So I proceeded. ‘Now the final question I want to ask you is this: Have you ever had anyone who has made serious love to you but Job Panton?’

‘Mr Charnworth made love to me,’ she sobbed out.

‘He flirted with you,’ I suggested.

‘No; he made love to me,’ she persisted. ‘He promised to marry me.’

‘And you believed him?’

‘Of course I did.’

‘Did Trankler promise to marry you?’

‘No.’

‘Then I must repeat the question, but will add Mr Charnworth’s name. Besides him and Panton, is there any one else in existence who has courted you in the hope that you would become his wife?’

‘No—no one,’ she mumbled in a broken voice.

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As I took my departure I felt that I had gathered up a good many threads, though they wanted arranging, and, so to speak, classifying; that done, they would probably give me the clue I was seeking. One thing was clear, Miss Downie was a weak-headed, giddy, flighty girl, incapable, as it seemed to me, of seriously reflecting on anything. Her cousin was crafty and shallow, and a dangerous companion for Downie, who was sure to be influenced and led by a creature like Jessie Turner. But, let it not be inferred from these remarks that I had any suspicion that either of the two women had in any way been accessory to the crime, for crime I was convinced it was. Trankler and Charnworth had been murdered, but by whom I was not prepared to even hint at at that stage of the proceedings. The two unfortunate gentlemen had, beyond all possibility of doubt, both been attracted by the girl's exceptionally good looks, and they had amused themselves with her. This fact suggested at once the question, was Charnworth in the habit of seeing her before Trankler made her acquaintance? Now, if my theory of the crime was correct, it could be asserted with positive certainty that Charnworth was the girl's lover before Trankler. Of course it was almost a foregone conclusion that Trankler must have been aware of her existence for a long time. The place, be it remembered, was small; she, in her way, was a sort of local celebrity, and it was hardly likely that young Trankler was ignorant of some of the village gossip in which she figured. But, assuming that he was, he was well acquainted with Charnworth, who was looked upon in the neighbourhood as 'a gay dog'. The female conquests of such men are often matters of notoriety; though, even if that was not the case, it was likely enough that Charnworth may have discussed Miss Downie in Trankler's presence. Some men—especially those of Charnworth's characteristics—are much given to boasting of their flirtations, and Charnworth may have been rather proud of his ascendancy over the simple village beauty. Of course,

all this, it will be said, was mere theorizing. So it was; but it will presently be seen how it squared in with the general theory of the whole affair, which I had worked out after much pondering, and a careful weighing and nice adjustment of all the evidence, such as it was, I had been able to gather together, and the various parts which were necessary before the puzzle could be put together.

It was immaterial, however, whether Trankler did or did not know Hester Downie before or at the same time as Charnworth. A point that was not difficult to determine was this—he did not make himself conspicuous as her admirer until after his friend's death, probably not until some time afterwards. Otherwise, how came it about that the slayer of Charnworth waited two years before he took the life of young Trankler? The reader will gather from this remark how my thoughts ran at that time. Firstly, I was clearly of opinion that both men had been murdered. Secondly, the murder in each case was the outcome of jealousy. Thirdly, the murderer must, as a logical sequence, have been a rejected suitor. This would point necessarily to Job Panton as the criminal, assuming my information was right that the girl had not had any other lover. But against that theory this very strong argument could be used: By what extraordinary and secret means—means that had baffled all the science of the district—had Job Panton, who occupied the position of a gamekeeper, been able to do away with his victims, and bring about death so horrible and so sudden as to make one shudder to think of it? Herein was displayed a devilishness of cunning, and a knowledge which it was difficult to conceive that an ignorant and untravelled man was likely to be in possession of. Logic, deduction, and all the circumstances of the case were opposed to the idea of Panton being the murderer at the first blush, and yet, so far as I had gone, I had been irresistibly drawn towards the conclusion that Panton was either directly or indirectly responsible for the death of the

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two gentlemen. But, in order to know something more of the man whom I suspected, I disguised myself as a traveling showman on the look-out for a good pitch for my show, and I took up my quarters for a day or two at a rustic inn just on the skirts of Knutsford, and known as the Woodman. I had previously ascertained that this inn was a favourite resort of the gamekeepers for miles round about, and Job Panton was to be found there almost nightly.

In a short time I had made his acquaintance. He was a young, big-limbed, powerful man, of a pronounced rustic type. He had the face of a gipsy—swarthy and dark, with keen, small black eyes, and a mass of black curly hair, and in his ears he wore tiny, plain gold rings. Singularly enough his expression was most intelligent; but allied with—as it seemed to me—a certain suggestiveness of latent ferocity. That is to say, I imagined him liable to outbursts of temper and passion, during which he might be capable of anything. As it was, then, he seemed to me subdued, somewhat sullen, and averse to conversation. He smoked heavily, and I soon found that he guzzled beer at a terrible rate. He had received, for a man in his position, a tolerably good education. By that I mean he could write a fair hand, he read well, and had something more than a smattering of arithmetic. I was told also that he was exceedingly skilful with carpenter's tools, although he had had no training that way; he also understood something about plants, while he was considered an authority on the habits, and everything appertaining to game. The same informant thought to still further enlighten me by adding.

‘Poor Job bean’t the chap he wur a year or more ago. His gal cut un, and that kind a took a hold on un. He doan’t say much; but it wur a terrible blow, it wur.’

‘How was it his girl cut him?’ I asked.

‘Well, you see, maäster, it wur this way; she thought hersel’ a bit too high for un. Mind you, I baan’t a saying

as she wur; but when a gel thinks hersel' above a chap, it's no use talking to her.'

'What was the girl's name?'

'They call her Downie. Her father was a miller here in Knutsford, but his gal had too big notions of hersel'; and she chucked poor Job Panton overboard, and they do say as how she took on wi' Measter Charnworth and also wi' Meäster Trankler. I doan't know nowt for certain myself, but there wur some rum kind o' talk going about. Least-wise, I know that Job took it badly, and he ain't been the same kind o' chap since. But there, what's the use of a braking one's 'art about a gal? Gals is a queer lot, I tell you. My old grandfather used to say, "Women folk be curious folk. They be necessary evils, they be, and pleasant enough in their way, but a chap mustn't let 'em get the upper hand. They're like harses, they be, and if you want to manage 'em, you must show 'em you're their meäster".'

The garrulous gentleman who entertained me thus with his views on women, was a tough, sinewy, weather-tanned old codger, who had lived the allotted span according to the psalmist, but who seemed destined to tread the earth for a long time still; for his seventy years had neither bowed nor shrunk him. His chatter was interesting to me because it served to prove what I already suspected, which was that Job Panton had taken his jilting very seriously indeed. Job was by no means a communicative fellow. As a matter of fact, it was difficult to draw him out on any subject; and though I should have liked to have heard *his* views about Hester Downie, I did not feel warranted in tapping him straight off. I very speedily discovered, however, that his weakness was beer. His capacity for it seemed immeasurable. He soaked himself with it; but when he reached the muddled stage, there was a tendency on his part to be more loquacious, and, taking advantage at last of one of these opportunities, I asked him one night if he had travelled. The question was an exceedingly pertinent one to my

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theory, and I felt that to a large extent the theory I had worked out depended upon the answers he gave. He turned his beady eyes upon me, and said, with a sort of sardonic grin—

‘Yes, I’ve travelled a bit in my time, meäster. I’ve been to Manchester often, and I once tramped all the way to Edinburgh. I had to rough it, I tell thee.’

‘Yes, I dare say,’ I answered. ‘But what I mean is, have you ever been abroad? Have you ever been to sea?’

‘No, measter, not me.’

‘You’ve been in foreign countries?’

‘No. I’ve never been out of this one. England was good enough for me. But I would like to go away now to Australia, or some of those places.’

‘Why?’

‘Well, meäster, I have my own reasons.’

‘Doubtless,’ I said, ‘and no doubt very sound reasons.’

‘Never thee mind whether they are, or whether they bean’t,’ he retorted warmly. ‘All I’ve got to say is, I wouldn’t care where I went to if I could only get far enough away from this place. I’m tired of it.’

In the manner of giving his answer, he betrayed the latent fire which I had surmised, and showed that there was a volcanic force of passion underlying his sullen silence, for he spoke with a suppressed force which clearly indicated the intensity of his feelings, and his bright eyes grew brighter with the emotion he felt. I now ventured upon another remark. I intended it to be a test one.

‘I heard one of your mates say that you had been jilted. I suppose that’s why you hate the place?’

He turned upon me suddenly. His tanned, ruddy face took on a deeper flush of red; his upper teeth closed almost savagely on his nether lip; his chest heaved, and his great, brawny hands clenched with the working of his passion. Then, with one great bang of his ponderous fist, he struck the table until the pots and glasses on it jumped as if they

were sentient and frightened; and in a voice thick with smothered passion, he growled, 'Yes, damn her! She's been my ruin.'

'Nonsense!' I said. 'You are a young man and a young man should not talk about being ruined because a girl has jilted him.'

Once more he turned that angry look upon me, and said fiercely—

'Thou knows nowt about it, governor. Thou're a stranger to me; and I doan't allow no strangers to preach to me. So shut up! I'll have nowt more to say to thee.'

There was a peremptoriness, a force of character, and a display of firmness and self-assurance in his tone and manner, which stamped him with a distinct individualism, and made it evident that in his own particular way he was distinct from the class in which his lot was cast. He, further than that, gave me the idea that he was designing and secretive; and given that he had been educated and well trained, he might have made his mark in the world. My interview with him had been instructive, and my opinion that he might prove a very important factor in working out the problem was strengthened; but at that stage of the inquiry I would not have taken upon myself to say, with anything like definiteness, that he was directly responsible for the death of the two gentlemen, whose mysterious ending had caused such a profound sensation. But the reader of this narrative will now see for himself that of all men, so far as one could determine then, who might have been interested in the death of Mr Charnworth and Mr Trankler, Job Panton stood out most conspicuously. His motive for destroying them was one of the most powerful of human passions—namely, jealousy, which in his case was likely to assume a very violent form, inasmuch as there was no evenly balanced judgment, no capability of philosophical reasoning, calculated to restrain the fierce, crude passion of the determined and self-willed man.

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such deadly destroyer of life had been used to put Charnworth and Trankler out of the way. But necessarily I was led to question whether or not it was likely that an untravelled and ignorant man like Job Panton could have known anything about such poisons and their uses. This was a stumbling-block; and while I was convinced that Panton had a strong motive for the crime, I was doubtful if he could have been in possession of the means for committing it. At last, in order to try and get evidence on this point, I resolved to search the place in which he lived. He had for a long time occupied lodgings in the house of a widow woman in Knutsford, and I subjected his rooms to a thorough and critical search, but without finding a sign of anything calculated to justify my suspicion.

I freely confess that at this stage I began to feel that the problem was a hopeless one, and that I should fail to work it out. My depression, however, did not last long. It was not my habit to acknowledge defeat so long as there were probabilities to guide me, so I began to make inquiries about Panton's relatives, and these inquiries elicited the fact that he had been in the habit of making frequent journeys to Manchester to see an uncle. I soon found that this uncle had been a sailor, and had been one of a small expedition which had travelled through Peru and Ecuador in search of gold. Now, this was a discovery indeed, and the full value of it will be understood when it is taken in connection with the information given to me by Professor Lucraft. Let us see how it works out logically.

Panton's uncle was a sailor and a traveller. He had travelled through Peru, and had been into the interior of Ecuador.

Panton was in the habit of visiting his uncle.

Could the uncle have wandered through Ecuador without hearing something of the marvellous poisons used by the natives?

Having been connected with an exploring expedition, it

was reasonable to assume that he was a man of good intelligence, and of an inquiring turn of mind.

Equally probable was it that he had brought home some of the deadly poisons or poisoned implements used by the Indians. Granted that, and what more likely than that he talked of his knowledge and possessions to his nephew? The nephew, brooding on his wrongs, and seeing the means within his grasp of secretly avenging himself on those whom he counted his rivals, obtained the means from his uncle's collection of putting his rivals to death, in a way which to him would seem to be impossible to detect. I had seen enough of Panton to feel sure that he had all the intelligence and cunning necessary for planning and carrying out the deed.

A powerful link in the chain of evidence had now been forged, and I proceeded a step further. After a consultation with the chief inspector of police, who, however, by no means shared my views, I applied for a warrant for Panton's arrest, although I saw that to establish legal proof of his guilt would be extraordinarily difficult, for his uncle at that time was at sea, somewhere in the southern hemisphere. Moreover, the whole case rested upon such a hypothetical basis, that it seemed doubtful whether, even supposing a magistrate would commit, a jury would convict. But I was not daunted, and, having succeeded so far in giving a practical shape to my theory, I did not intend to draw back. So I set to work to endeavour to discover the weapon which had been used for wounding Charnworth and Trankler, so that the poison might take effect. This, of course, was the *cruz* of the whole affair. The discovery of the medium by which the death-scratch was given would forge almost the last link necessary to ensure a conviction.

Now, in each case there was pretty conclusive evidence that there had been no struggle. This fact justified the belief that the victim was struck silently, and probably unknown to himself. What were the probabilities of that

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being the case? Assuming that Panton was guilty of the crime, how was it that he, being an inferior, was allowed to come within striking distance of his victims? The most curious thing was that both men had been scratched on the left side of the neck. Charnworth had been killed in his friend's garden on a summer night. Trankler had fallen in mid-day in the depths of a forest. There was an interval of two years between the death of the one man and the death of the other, yet each had a scratch on the left side of the neck. That could not have been a mere coincidence. It was design.

The next point for consideration was, how did Panton—always assuming that he was the criminal—get access to Mr Trankler's grounds? Firstly, the grounds were extensive, and in connection with a plantation of young fir trees. When Charnworth was found, he was lying behind a clump of rhododendron bushes, and near where the grounds were merged into the plantation, a somewhat dilapidated oak fence separating the two. These details before us make it clear that Panton could have had no difficulty in gaining access to the plantation, and thence to the grounds. But how came it that he was there just at the time that Charnworth was strolling about? It seemed stretching a point very much to suppose that he could have been loafing about on the mere chance of seeing Charnworth. And the only hypothesis that squared in with intelligent reasoning, was that the victim had been lured into the grounds. But this necessarily presupposed a confederate. Close inquiry elicited the fact that Panton was in the habit of going to the house. He knew most of the servants, and frequently accompanied young Trankler on his shooting excursions, and periodically he spent half a day or so in the gun room at the house, in order that he might clean up all the guns, for which he was paid a small sum every month. These circumstances cleared the way of difficulties to a very considerable extent. I was unable, however, to go beyond that,

for I could not ascertain the means that had been used to lure Mr Charnworth into the garden—if he had been lured; and I felt sure that he had been. But so much had to remain for the time being a mystery.

Having obtained the warrant to arrest Panton, I proceeded to execute it. He seemed thunderstruck when told that he was arrested on a charge of having been instrumental in bringing about the death of Charnworth and Trankler. For a brief space of time he seemed to collapse, and lose his presence of mind. But suddenly, with an apparent effort, he recovered himself, and said, with a strange smile on his face—

‘You’ve got to prove it, and that you can never do.’

His manner and this remark were hardly compatible with innocence, but I clearly recognized the difficulties of proof.

From that moment the fellow assumed a self-assured air, and to those with whom he was brought in contact he would remark:

‘I’m as innocent as a lamb, and them as says I done the deed have got to prove it.’

In my endeavour to get further evidence to strengthen my case, I managed to obtain from Job Panton’s uncle’s brother, who followed the occupation of an engine-minder in a large cotton factory in Oldham, an old chest containing a quantity of lumber. The uncle, on going to sea again, had left this chest in charge of his brother. A careful examination of the contents proved that they consisted of a very miscellaneous collection of odds and ends, including two or three small, carved wooden idols from some savage country; some stone weapons, such as are used by the North American Indians; strings of cowrie shells, a pair of moccasins, feathers of various kinds; a few dried specimens of strange birds, and last, though not least, a small bamboo case containing a dozen tiny sharply pointed darts, feathered at the thick end; while in a stone box, about three

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inches square, was a viscid thick gummy looking substance of a very dark brown colour, and giving off a sickening and most disagreeable, though faint odour. These things I at once submitted to Professor Lucraft, who expressed an opinion that the gummy substance in the stone box was a vegetable poison, used probably to poison the darts with. He lost no time in experimentalizing with this substance, as well as with the darts. With these darts he scratched guinea-pigs, rabbits, a dog, a cat, a hen, and a young pig, and in each case death ensued in periods of time ranging from a quarter of an hour to two hours. By means of a subcutaneous injection into a rabbit of a minute portion of the gummy substance, about the size of a pea, which had been thinned with alcohol, he produced death in exactly seven minutes. A small monkey was next procured, and slightly scratched on the neck with one of the poisoned darts. In a very short time the poor animal exhibited the most distressing symptoms, and in half an hour it was dead, and a post-mortem examination revealed many of the peculiar effects which had been observed in Charnworth's and Trankler's bodies. Various other exhaustive experiments were carried out, all of which confirmed the deadly nature of these minute poison-darts, which could be puffed through a hollow tube to a great distance, and after some practice, with unerring aim. Analysis of the gummy substance in the box proved it to be a violent vegetable poison; innocuous when swallowed, but singularly active and deadly when introduced direct into the blood.

On the strength of these facts, the magistrate duly committed Job Panton to take his trial at the next assizes, on a charge of murder, although there was not a scrap of evidence forthcoming to prove that he had ever been in possession of any of the darts or the poison; and unless such evidence was forthcoming, it was felt that the case for the prosecution must break down, however clear the mere guilt of the man might seem.

In due course, Pantan was put on his trial at Chester, and the principal witness against him was Hester Downie, who was subjected to a very severe cross-examination, which left not a shadow of a doubt that she and Pantan had at one time been close sweethearts. But her cousin Jessie Turner proved a tempter of great subtlety. It was made clear that she poisoned the girl's mind against her humble lover. Although it could not be proved, it is highly probable that Jessie Turner was a creature of and in the pay of Mr Charnworth, who seemed to have been very much attracted by him. Hester's connection with Charnworth half maddened Pantan, who made frantic appeals to her to be true to him, appeals to which she turned a deaf ear. That Trankler knew her in Charnworth's time was also brought out, and after Charnworth's death she smiled favourably on the young man. On the morning that Trankler's shooting-party went out to Mere Forest, Pantan was one of the beaters employed by the party.

So much was proved, so much was made as clear as daylight, and it opened the way for any number of inferences. But the last and most important link was never forthcoming. Pantan was defended by an able and unscrupulous counsel, who urged with tremendous force on the notice of the jury, that firstly, not one of the medical witnesses would undertake to swear that the two men had died from the effects of poison similar to that found in the old chest which had belonged to the prisoner's uncle; and secondly, there was not one scrap of evidence tending to prove that Pantan had ever been in possession of poisoned darts, or had ever had access to the chest in which they were kept. These two points were also made much of by the learned judge in his summing up. He was at pains to make clear that there was a doubt involved, and that mere inference ought not to be allowed to outweigh the doubt when a human being was on trial for his life. Although circumstantially the evidence very strongly pointed to the prob-

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ability of the prisoner having killed both men, nevertheless, in the absence of the strong proof which the law demanded, the way was opened for the escape of a suspected man, and it was far better to let the law be cheated of its due, than that an innocent man should suffer. At the same time, the judge went on, two gentlemen had met their deaths in a manner which had baffled medical science, and no one was forthcoming who would undertake to say that they had been killed in the manner suggested by the prosecution, and yet it had been shown that the terrible and powerful poison found in the old chest, and which there was reason to believe had been brought from some part of the little known country near the sources of the mighty Amazon, would produce all the effects which were observed in the bodies of Charnworth and Trankler. The chest, furthermore, in which the poison was discovered, was in the possession of Panton's uncle. Panton had a powerful motive in the shape of consuming jealousy for getting rid of his more favoured rivals; and though he was one of the shooting-party in Mere Forest on the day that Trankler lost his life, no evidence had been produced to prove that he was on the premises of Dead Wood Hall, on the night that Charnworth died. If, in weighing all these points of evidence, the jury were of opinion the circumstantial evidence was inadequate, then it was their duty to give the prisoner—whose life was in their hands—the benefit of the doubt.

The jury retired, and were absent three long hours, and it became known that they could not agree. Ultimately, they returned into court, and pronounced a verdict of 'Not guilty'. In Scotland the verdict must and would have been *non proven*.

And so Job Panton went free, but an evil odour seemed to cling about him; he was shunned by his former companions, and many a suspicious glance was directed to him, and many a bated murmur was uttered as he passed by, until in a while he went forth beyond the seas, to the

far wild west, as some said, and his haunts knew him no more.

The mystery is still a mystery; but how near I came to solving the problem of Dead Wood Hall it is for the reader to judge.

IV

The Case of Janissary

Arthur Morrison

I

In the year 1897 a short report of an ordinary sort of inquest appeared in the London newspapers, and I here transcribe it.

‘Dr McCulloch held an inquest yesterday on the body of Mr Henry Lawrence, whose body was found on Tuesday morning last in the river near Vauxhall Bridge. The deceased was well known in certain sporting circles. Sophia Lawrence, the widow, said that deceased had left home on Monday afternoon at about five, in his usual health, saying that he was to dine at a friend’s and she saw nothing more of him till called upon to identify the body. He had no reason for suicide, and so far as witness knew, was free from pecuniary embarrassments. He had, indeed, been very successful in betting recently. He habitually carried a large pocket-book, with papers in it. Mr Robert Naylor, commission agent, said that deceased dined with him that evening at his house in Gold Street, Chelsea, and left for home at about half-past eleven. He had at the time a sum of nearly four hundred pounds upon him, chiefly in notes, which had been paid him by witness in settlement of a bet

It was a fine night, and deceased walked in the direction of Chelsea Embankment. That was the last witness saw of him. He might not have been perfectly sober, but he was not drunk, and was capable of taking care of himself. The evidence of the Thames police went to show that no money was on the body when found, except a few coppers, and no pocket-book. Dr William Hodgetts said that death was due to drowning. There were some bruises on the arms and head which might have been caused before death. The body was a very healthy one. The coroner said that there seemed to be a strong suspicion of foul play, unless the pocket-book of the deceased had got out of his pocket in the water, but the evidence was very meagre, although the police appeared to have made every possible inquiry. The jury returned a verdict of "Found Drowned, though how the deceased came into the water there was no evidence to show".'

I know no more of the unfortunate man Lawrence than this, and I have only printed the cutting here because it probably induced Dorrington to take certain steps in the case I am dealing with. With that case the fate of the man Lawrence has nothing whatever to do. He passes out of the story entirely.

II

Mr Warren Telfer was a gentleman of means, and the owner of a few—very few—racehorses. But he had a great knack of buying hidden prizes in yearlings, and what his stable lacked in quantity it often more than made up for in quality. Thus he had once bought a St Leger winner for as little as a hundred and fifty pounds. Many will remember his bitter disappointment of ten or a dozen years back, when his horse, Matfelon, starting an odds-on favourite for the Two Thousand, never even got among the crowd, and ambled in streets behind everything. It was freely

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rumoured (and no doubt with cause) that Matfelon had been 'got at' and in some way 'nobbled'. There were hints of a certain bucket of water administered just before the race—a bucket of water observed in the hands, some said of one, some said of another person connected with Ritter's training establishment. There was no suspicion of pulling, for plainly the jockey was doing his best with the animal all the way along, and never had a tight rein. So a nobbling it must have been, said the knowing ones, and Mr. Warren Telfer said so too, with much bitterness. More, he immediately removed his horses from Ritter's stables, and started a small training place of his own for his own horses merely; putting an old steeplechase jockey in charge, who had come out of a bad accident permanently lame, and had fallen on evil days.

The owner was an impulsive and violent-tempered man, who, once a notion was in his head, held to it through every thing, and in spite of everything. His misfortune with Matfelon made him the most insanely distrustful man alive. In everything he fancied he saw a trick; and to him every man seemed a scoundrel. He could scarce bear to let the very stable-boys touch his horses, and although for years all went as well as could be expected in his stables, his suspicious distrust lost nothing of its virulence. He was perpetually fussing about the stables, making surprise visits, and laying futile traps that convicted nobody. The sole tangible result of this behaviour was a violent quarrel between Mr. Warren Telfer and his nephew Richard, who had been making a lengthened stay with his uncle. Young Telfer, to tell the truth, was neither so discreet nor so exemplary in behaviour as he might have been, but his temper was that characteristic of the family, and when he conceived that his uncle had an idea that he was communicating stable secrets to friends outside, there was an animated row, and the nephew betook himself and his luggage somewhere else. Young Telfer always insisted, howev

that his uncle was not a bad fellow on the whole, though he had habits of thought and conduct that made him altogether intolerable at times. But the uncle had no good word for his graceless nephew; and indeed Richard Telfer betted more than he could afford, and was not so particular in his choice of sporting acquaintances as a gentleman should have been.

Mr Warren Telfer's house, Blackhall, and his stables were little more than two miles from Redbury, in Hampshire; and after the quarrel Mr Richard Telfer was not seen near the place for many months—not, indeed, till excitement was high over the forthcoming race for the Redbury Stakes, for which there was an entry from the stable—Janissary, for long ranked second favourite; and then the owner's nephew did not enter the premises, and, in fact, made his visit as secret as possible.

I have said that Janissary was long ranked second favourite for the Redbury Stakes, but a little more than a week before the race he became first favourite, owing to a training mishap to the horse fancied first, which made its chances so poor that it might have been scratched at any moment. And so far was Janissary above the class of the field (though it was a two-year-old race, and there might be a surprise) that it at once went to far shorter odds than the previous favourite, which, indeed, had it run fit and well, would have found Janissary no easy colt to beat.

Mr Telfer's nephew was seen near the stables but two or three days before the race, and that day the owner despatched a telegram to the firm of Dorrington & Hicks. In response to the telegram, Dorrington caught the first available train for Redbury, and was with Mr Warren Telfer in his library by five in the afternoon.

‘It is about my horse Janissary that I want to consult you, Mr Dorrington,’ said Mr Telfer. ‘It's right enough now—or at least was right at exercise this morning—but I feel certain that there's some diabolical plot on hand some-

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where to interfere with the horse before the Redbury Stakes day, and I'm sorry to have to say that I suspect my own nephew to be mixed up in it in some way. In the first place I may tell you that there is no doubt whatever that the colt, if let alone, and bar accident, can win in a canter. He could have won even if Herald, the late favourite, had kept well, for I can tell you that Janissary is a far greater horse than anybody is aware of outside my establishment—or at any rate, than anybody ought to be aware of, if the stable secrets are properly kept. His pedigree is nothing very great, and he never showed his quality till quite lately, in private trials. Of course it has leaked out somehow that the colt is exceptionally good—I don't believe I can trust a soul in the place. How should the price have gone up to five to four unless somebody had been telling what he's paid not to tell? But that isn't all, as I have said. I've a conviction that something's on foot—somebody wants to interfere with the horse. Of course we get a tout about now and again, but the downs are pretty big, and we generally manage to dodge them if we want to. On the last three or four mornings, however, wherever Janissary might be taking his gallop, there was a big, hulking fellow, with a red beard and spectacles—not so much watching the horse as trying to get hold of the lad. I am always up at five, for I've found to my cost—you remember about Matfelon—that if a man doesn't want to be ramped he must never take his eye off things. Well, I have scarcely seen the lad ease the colt once on the last three or four mornings without that red-bearded fellow bobbing up from a knoll, or a clump of bushes, or something, close by—especially if Janissary was a bit away from the other horses, and not under my nose, or the head lad's, for a moment. I rode at the fellow, of course, when I saw what he was after, but he was artful as a cartload of monkeys, and vanished somehow before I could get near him. The head lad believes he has seen him about just after dark, too; but I am keeping the stable lads in when they're not riding,

and I suppose he finds he has no chance of getting at them except when they're out with the horses. This morning, not only did I see this fellow about, as usual, but, I am ashamed to say, I observed my own nephew acting the part of a common tout. He certainly had the decency to avoid me and clear out, but that was not all, as you shall see. This morning, happening to approach the stables from the back, I suddenly came upon the red-bearded man—giving money to a groom of mine! He ran off at once, as you may guess, and I discharged the groom where he stood, and would not allow him into the stables again. He offered no explanation or excuse, but took himself off, and half an hour afterwards I almost sent away my head boy too. For when I told him of the dismissal, he admitted that he had seen that same groom taking money of my nephew at the back of the stables, an hour before, and had not informed me! He said that he thought that as it was "only Mr Richard" it didn't matter. Fool! Anyway, the groom has gone, and, so far as I can tell as yet, the colt is all right. I examined him at once, of course; and I also turned over a box that Weeks, the groom, used to keep brushes and odd things in. There I found this paper full of powder. I don't yet know what it is, but it's certainly nothing he had any business with in the stable. Will you take it?

'And now,' Mr Telfer went on, 'I'm in such an uneasy state that I want your advice and assistance. Quite apart from the suspicious—more than suspicious—circumstances I have informed you of, I am *certain*—I know it without being able to give precise reasons—I am *certain* that some attempt is being made at disabling Janissary before Thursday's race. I feel it in my bones, so to speak. I had the same suspicion just before that Two Thousand, when Matfelon was got at. The thing was in the air, as it is now. Perhaps it's a sort of instinct, but I rather think it is the result of an unconscious absorption of a number of little indications about me. Be it as it may, I am resolved to leave no opening

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to the enemy if I can help it, and I want to see if you can suggest any further precautions beyond those I am taking. Come and look at the stables.'

Dorrington could see no opening for any piece of rascality by which he might make more of the case than by serving his client loyally, so he resolved to do the latter. He followed Mr Telfer through the training stables, where eight or nine thoroughbreds stood, and could suggest no improvement upon the exceptional precautions that already existed.

'No,' said Dorrington, 'I don't think you can do any better than this—at least on this, the inner line of defence. But it is best to make the outer lines secure first. By the way, *this* isn't Janissary, is it? We saw him farther up the row, didn't we?'

'Oh no, that's a very different sort of colt, though he does look like, doesn't he? People who've been up and down the stables once or twice often confuse them. They're both bays, much of a build, and about the same height, and both have a bit of stocking on the same leg, though Janissary's is bigger, and this animal has a white star. But you never saw two creatures look so like and run so differently. This is a dead loss—not worth his feed. If I can manage to wind him up to something like a gallop I shall try to work him off in a selling plate somewhere, but as far as I can see he isn't good enough even for that. He's a disappointment. And his stock's far better than Janissary's too, and he cost half as much again! Yearlings are a lottery. Still, I've drawn a prize or two among them, at one time or another.'

'Ah yes, so I've heard. But now as to the outer defences I was speaking of. Let us find out *who* is trying to interfere with your horse. Do you mind letting me into the secrets of the stable commissions?'

'Oh no. We're talking in confidence, of course. I've backed the colt pretty heavily all round, but not too much anywhere. There's a good slice with Barker—you know Barker, of course; Mullins has a thousand down for him, and

that was at five to one, before Herald went amiss. Then there's Ford and Lascelles—both good men, and Naylor—he's the smallest man of them all, and there's only a hundred or two with him, though he's been laying the horse pretty freely everywhere, at least until Herald went wrong. And there's Pedder. But there must have been a deal of money laid to outside backers, and there's no telling who may contemplate a ramp.'

'Just so. Now as to your nephew. What of your suspicions in that direction?'

'Perhaps I'm a little hasty as to that,' Mr Telfer answered, a little ashamed of what he had previously said. 'But I'm worried and mystified, as you see, and hardly know what to think. My nephew Richard is a little erratic, and he has a foolish habit of betting more than he can afford. He and I quarrelled some time back, while he was staying here, because I had an idea that he had been talking too freely outside. He had, in fact; and I regarded it as a breach of confidence. So there was a quarrel and he went away.'

'Very well. I wonder if I can get a bed at the "Crown" at Redbury. I'm afraid it'll be crowded, but I'll try.'

'But why trouble? Why not stay with me, and be near the stables?'

'Because then I should be of no more use to you than one of your lads. People who come out here every morning are probably staying at Redbury, and I must go there after them.'

III

The 'Crown' at Redbury was full in anticipation of the races, but Dorrington managed to get a room ordinarily occupied by one of the landlord's family, who undertook to sleep at a friend's for a night or two. This settled, he strolled into the yard, and soon fell into animated talk with the hostler on the subject of the forthcoming races. All the

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town was backing Janissary for the Stakes, the hostler said, and he advised Dorrington to do the same.

During this conversation two men stopped in the street, just outside the yard gate, talking. One was a big, heavy, vulgar-looking fellow in a box-cloth coat, and with a shaven face and hoarse voice; the other was a slighter, slimmer, younger and more gentlemanlike man, though there was a certain patchy colour about his face that seemed to hint of anything but teetotalism.

'There,' said the hostler, indicating the younger of these two men, 'that's young Mr Telfer, him as whose uncle's owner o' Janissary. He's a young plunger, he is, and he's on Janissary too. He give me the tip, straight, this mornin' "You put your little bit on my uncle's colt," he said. "It's all right. I an't such pals with the old man as I was, but I've got the tip that *his* money's down on it. So don't neglect your opportunities, Thomas," he says; and I haven't. He's stoppin' in our house, is young Mr Richard.'

'And who is that he is talking to? A bookmaker?'

'Yes, sir, that's Naylor—Bob Naylor. He's got Mr Richard's bets. P'raps he's putting' on a bit more now.'

The men at the gate separated, and the bookmaker walked off down the street in the fast gathering dusk. Richard Telfer, however, entered the house, and Dorrington followed him. Telfer mounted the stairs and went into his room. Dorrington lingered a moment on the stairs and then went and knocked at Telfer's door.

'Hullo!' cried Telfer, coming to the door and peering out into the gloomy corridor.

'I beg pardon,' Dorrington replied courteously. 'I thought this was Naylor's room.'

'No—it's No. 23, by the end. But I believe he's just gone down the street.'

Dorrington expressed his thanks and went to his own room. He took one or two small instruments from his bag and hurried stealthily to the door of No. 23.

All was quiet, and the door opened at once to Dorrington's picklock, for there was nothing but the common tumbler rimlock to secure it. Dorrington, being altogether an unscrupulous scoundrel, would have thought nothing of entering a man's room thus for purposes of mere robbery. Much less scruple had he in doing so in the present circumstances. He lit the candle in a little pocket lantern, and, having secured the door, looked quickly about the room. There was nothing unusual to attract his attention, and he turned to two bags lying near the dressing-table. One was the usual bookmaker's satchel, and the other was a leather travelling-bag; both were locked. Dorrington unbuckled the straps of the large bag and produced a slender picklock of steel wire, with a sliding joint, which, with a little skilful 'humouring', turned the lock in the course of a minute or two. One glance inside was enough. There on the top lay a large false beard of strong red, and upon the shirts below was a pair of spectacles. But Dorrington went farther, and felt carefully below the linen till his hand met a small, flat, mahogany box. This he withdrew and opened. Within, on a velvet lining, lay a small silver instrument resembling a syringe. He shut and replaced the box, and, having rearranged the contents of the bag, shut, locked and strapped it, and blew out his light. He had found what he came to look for. In another minute Mr Bob Naylor's door was locked behind him, and Dorrington took his picklocks to his own room.

It was a noisy evening in the Commercial Room at the 'Crown'. Chaff and laughter flew thick, and Richard Telfer threatened Naylor with a terrible settling day. More was drunk than thirst strictly justified, and everybody grew friendly with everybody else. Dorrington, sober and keenly alert, affected the reverse, and exhibited especial and extreme affection for Mr Bob Naylor. His advances were unsuccessful at first, but Dorrington's manner and the 'Crown' whisky overcame the bookmaker's reserve, and at

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about eleven o'clock the two left the house arm in arm for a cooling stroll in the High Street. Dorrington blabbed and chattered with great success, and soon began about Janissary.

'So you've pretty well done all you want with Janissary, eh? Book full? Ah! nothing like keeping a book even all round—it's the safest way—'specially with such a colt as Janissary about. Eh, my boy?' He nudged Naylor genially. 'Ah! no doubt it's a good colt, but old Telfer has rum notions about preparation, hasn't he?'

'I dunno,' replied Naylor. 'How do you mean?'

'Why, what does he have the horse led up and down behind the stable for, half an hour every afternoon?'

'Didn't know he did.'

'Ah! but he does. I came across it only this afternoon. I was coming over the downs, and just as I got round behind Telfer's stables there I saw a fine bay colt, with a white stocking on the off hind leg, well covered up in a suit of clothes, being led up and down by a lad, like a sentry—up and down, up and down—about twenty yards each way, and nobody else about. "Hullo!" says I to the lad, "hullo! what horse is this?" "Janissary," says the boy—pretty free for a stable-lad. "Ah!" says I. "And what are you walking him like that for?" "Dunno," says the boy, "but it's gov'nor's orders. Every afternoon, at two to the minute, I have to bring him out here and walk him like this for half an hour exactly, neither more or less, and then he goes in and has a handful of malt. But I dunno why." "Well," says I, "I never heard of that being done before. But he's a fine colt," and I put my hand under the cloth and felt him—hard as nails and smooth as silk.'

'And the boy let you touch him?'

'Yes; he struck me as a bit easy for a stable-boy. But it's an odd trick, isn't it, that of the half-hour's walk and the handful of malt? Never hear of anybody else doing it, did you?'

‘No, I never did.’

They talked and strolled for another quarter of an hour, and then finished up with one more drink.

IV

The next was the day before the race, and in the morning Dorrington, making a circuit, came to Mr Warren Telfer’s from the farther side. As soon as they were assured of privacy: ‘Have you seen the man with the red beard this morning?’ asked Dorrington.

‘No; I looked out pretty sharply, too.’

‘That’s right. If you like to fall in with my suggestions, however, you shall see him at about two o’clock, and take a handsome rise out of him.’

‘Very well,’ Mr Telfer replied. ‘What’s your suggestion?’

‘I’ll tell you. In the first place, what’s the value of that other horse that looks so like Janissary?’

‘Hamid is his name. He’s worth—well, what he will fetch. I’ll sell him for fifty and be glad of the chance.’

‘Very good. Then you’ll no doubt be glad to risk his health temporarily to make sure of the Redbury Stakes, and to get longer prices for anything you may like to put on between now and to-morrow afternoon. Come to the stables and I’ll tell you. But first, is there a place where we may command a view of the ground behind the stables without being seen?’

‘Yes, there’s a ventilation grating at the back of each stall.’

‘Good! Then we’ll watch from Hamid’s stall, which will be empty. Select your most wooden-faced and most careful boy, and send him out behind the stable with Hamid at two o’clock to the moment. Put the horse in a full suit of clothes—it is necessary to cover up that white star—and tell the lad he must *lead* it up and down slowly

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for twenty yards or so. I rather expect the red-bearded man will be coming along between two o'clock and half-past two. You will understand that Hamid is to be Janissary for the occasion. You must drill your boy to appear a bit of a fool, and to overcome his stable education sufficiently to chatter freely—so long as it is the proper chatter. The man may ask the horse's name, or he may not. Anyway, the boy mustn't forget it is Janissary he is leading. You have an odd fad, you must know (and the boy must know it too) in the matter of training. This ridiculous fad is to have your colt walked up and down for half an hour exactly at two o'clock every afternoon, and then given a handful of malt as he comes in. The boy can talk as freely about this as he pleases, and also about the colt's chances, and anything else he likes; and he is to let the stranger come up, talk to the horse, pat him—in short, to do as he pleases. Is that plain?

'Perfectly. You have found out something about this red-bearded chap then?'

'Oh, yes—it's Naylor the bookmaker, as a matter of fact, with a false beard.'

'What! Naylor?'

'Yes. You see the idea, of course. Once Naylor thinks he has nobbled the favourite he will lay it to any extent, and the odds will get longer. Then you can make him pay for his little games.'

'Well, yes, of course. Though I wouldn't put too much with Naylor in any case. He's not a big man, and he might break and lose me the lot. But I can get it out of the others.'

'Just so. You'd better see about schooling your boy now, I think. I'll tell you more presently.'

A minute or two before two o'clock Dorrington and Telfer, mounted on a pair of steps, were gazing through the ventilation grating of Hamid's stall, while the colt, clothed completely, was led around. Then Dorrington described his operations of the previous evening.

'No matter what he may think of my tale,' he said,

'Naylor will be pretty sure to come. He has tried to bribe your stablemen, and has been baffled. Every attempt to get hold of the boy in charge of Janissary has failed, and he will be glad to clutch at any shadow of a chance to save his money now. Once he is here, and the favourite apparently at his mercy, the thing is done. By the way, I expect your nephew's little present to the man you sacked was a fairly innocent one. No doubt he merely asked the man whether Janissary was keeping well, and was thought good enough to win, for I find he is backing it pretty heavily. Naylor came afterwards, with much less innocent intentions, but fortunately you were down on him in time. Several considerations induced me to go to Naylor's room. In the first place, I have heard rather shady tales of his doings on one or two occasions, and he did not seem a sufficiently big man to stand to lose a great deal over your horse. Then, when I saw him, I observed that his figure bore a considerable resemblance to that of the man you had described, except as regards the red beard and the spectacles—articles easily enough assumed, and, indeed, often enough used by the scum of the ring whose trade is welshing. And, apart from these considerations, here, at any rate, was one man who had an interest in keeping your colt from winning, and here was his room waiting for me to explore. So I explored it, and the card turned up trumps.'

As he was speaking, the stable-boy, a stolid-looking youngster, was leading Hamid back and forth on the turf before their eyes.

'There's somebody,' said Dorrington suddenly, 'over in that clump of trees. Yes—our man, sure enough. I felt pretty sure of him after you had told me that he hadn't thought it worth while to turn up this morning. Here he comes.'

Naylor, with his red beard sticking out over the collar of his big coat, came slouching along with an awkwardly assumed air of carelessness and absence of mind

'Hullo!' he said suddenly, as he came abreast of the

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horse, turning as though but now aware of its presence, 'that's a valuable sort of horse, ain't it, my lad?'

'Yes,' said the boy, 'it is. He's goin' to win the Redbury Stakes to-morrow. It's Janissary.'

'Oh! Janey Sairey, is it?' Naylor answered, with a quaint affectation of gaping ignorance. 'Janey Sairey, eh? Well, she do look a fine 'orse, what I can see of 'er. What a suit o' clo'es! An' so she's one o' the 'orses that runs in races, is she? Well, I never! Pretty much like other 'orses, too, to look at, ain't she? Only a bit thin in the legs.'

The boy stood carelessly by the colt's side, and the man approached. His hand came quickly from an inner pocket, and then he passed it under Hamid's cloths, near the shoulder. 'Ah, it do feel a lovely skin, to be sure!' he said. 'An' so there's goin' to be races at Redbury to-morrow, is there? I dunno anythin' about races myself, an'—Oo my!'

Naylor sprang back as the horse, flinging back its ears, started suddenly, swung round, and reared. 'Lor,' he said, 'what a vicious brute! Jist because I stroked her! I'll be careful about touching racehorses again.' His hand passed stealthily to the pocket again, and he hurried on his way, while the stable-boy steadied and soothed Hamid.

Telfer and Dorrington sniggered quietly in their concealment. 'He's taken a deal of trouble, hasn't he?' Dorrington remarked. 'It's a sad case of the biter bit for Mr Naylor, I'm afraid. That was a prick the colt felt—hypodermic injection with the syringe I saw in the bag, no doubt. The boy won't be such a fool as to come in again at once, will he? If Naylor's taking a look back from anywhere, that may make him suspicious.'

'No fear. I've told him to keep out for the half-hour, and he'll do it. Dear, dear, what an innocent person Mr Bob Naylor is! "Well, I never! Pretty much like other horses!" He didn't know there were to be races at Redbury! "Janey Sairey," too—it's really very funny!'

Ere the half-hour was quite over, Hamid came stumbling and dragging into the stable yard, plainly all amiss, and collapsed on his litter as soon as he gained his stall. There he lay, shivering and drowsy.

'I expect he'll get over it in a day or two,' Dorrington remarked 'I don't suppose a vet could do much for him just now, except, perhaps, give him a drench and let him take a rest. Certainly, the effect will last over tomorrow. That's what it is calculated for.'

V

The Redbury Stakes were run at three in the afternoon, after two or three minor events had been disposed of. The betting had undergone considerable fluctuations during the morning, but in general it ruled heavily against Janissary. The story had got about, too, that Mr Warren Telfer's colt would not start. So that when the numbers went up, and it was seen that Janissary was starting after all, there was much astonishment, and a good deal of uneasiness in the ring.

'It's a pity we can't see our friend Naylor's face just now, isn't it?' Dorrington remarked to his client, as they looked on from Mr Telfer's drag.

'Yes, it would be interesting,' Telfer replied. 'He was quite confident last night, you say.'

'Quite. I tested him by an offer of a small bet on your colt, asking some points over the odds, and he took it at once. Indeed, I believe he has been going about gathering up all the wagers he could about Janissary, and the market has felt it. Your nephew has risked some more with him, I believe, and altogether it looks as though the town would spoil the "bookies" badly.'

As the horses came from the weighing enclosure, Janissary was seen conspicuous among them, bright, clean, and firm, and a good many faces lengthened at the sight. The start was not so good as it might have been, but the

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favourite (the starting-price had gone to evens) was not left, and got away well in the crowd of ten starters. There he lay till rounding the bend, when the Telfer blue and chocolate was seen among the foremost, and near the rails. Mr Telfer almost trembled as he watched through his glasses.

‘Hang that Willett!’ he said, almost to himself. ‘He’s too clever against those rails before getting clear. All right, though, all right! He’s coming!’

Janissary, indeed, was showing in front, and as the horses came along the straight it was plain that Mr Telfer’s colt was holding the field comfortably. There were changes in the crowd; some dropped away, some came out and attempted to challenge for the lead, but the favourite, striding easily, was never seriously threatened, and in the end, being a little let out, came in a three-lengths winner, never once having been made to show his best.

‘I congratulate you, Mr Telfer,’ said Dorrington, ‘and you may congratulate me.’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ said Mr Telfer hastily, hurrying off to lead in the winner.

It was a bad race for the ring, and in the open parts of the course many a humble fielder grabbed his satchel ere the shouting was over, and made his best pace for the horizon; and more than one pair of false whiskers, as red as Naylor’s, came off suddenly while the owner betook himself to a fresh stand. Unless a good many outsiders sailed home before the end of the week there would be a bad Monday for layers. But all sporting Redbury was jubilant. They had all been ‘on’ the local favourite for the local race, and it had won.

VI

Mr Bob Naylor ‘got a bit back’, in his own phrase, on other races by the end of the week, but all the same he saw

a black settling day ahead. He had been done—done for a certainty. He had realized this as soon as he saw the numbers go up for the Redbury Stakes. Janissary had not been drugged after all. That meant that another horse had been substituted for him, and that the whole thing was an elaborate plant. He thought he knew Janissary pretty well by sight, too, and rather prided himself on having an eye for a horse. But clearly it was a plant—a complete do. Telfer was in it, and so of course was that gentlemanly stranger who had strolled along Redbury High Street with him that night, telling that cock-and-bull story about the afternoon walks and the handful of malt. There was a nice schoolboy tale to take in a man who thought himself broad as Cheapside! He cursed himself high and low. To be done, and to know it, was a galling thing, but this would be worse. The tale would get about. They would boast of a clever stroke like that, and that would injure him with everybody; with honest men, because his reputation, as it was, would bear no worsening, and with knaves like himself, because they would laugh at him, and leave him out when any little co-operative swindle was in contemplation. But though the chagrin of the defeat was bitter bad enough, his losses were worse. He had taken everything offered on Janissary after he had nobbled the wrong horse, and had given almost any odds demanded. Do as he might, he could see nothing but a balance against him on Monday, which, though he might pay out his last cent, he could not cover by several hundred pounds.

But on the day he met his customers at his club, as usual, and paid out freely. Young Richard Telfer, however, with whom he was heavily 'in', he put off till the evening. 'I've been a bit disappointed this morning over some ready that was to be paid over,' he said, 'and I've used the last cheque-form in my book. You might come and have a bit of dinner with me to-night, Mr Telfer, and take it then.'

Telfer assented without difficulty.

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'All right, then, that's settled. You know the place—Gold Street. Seven sharp. The missis 'll be pleased to see you, I'm sure, Mr Telfer. Let's see—it's fifteen hundred and thirty altogether, isn't it?'

'Yes, that's it. I'll come.'

Young Telfer left the club, and at the corner of the street ran against Dorrington. Telfer, of course, knew him as his late fellow-guest at the 'Crown' at Redbury, and this was their first meeting in London after their return from the races.

'Ah!' said Telfer. 'Going to draw a bit of Janissary money, eh?'

'Oh, I haven't much to draw,' Dorrington answered. 'But I expect your pockets are pretty heavy, if you've just come from Naylor.'

'Yes, I've just come from Naylor, but I haven't touched the merry sovs just yet,' replied Telfer cheerfully. 'There's been a run on Naylor, and I'm going to dine with him and his respectable missis this evening, and draw the plunder then. I feel rather curious to see what sort of establishment a man like Naylor keeps going. His place is in Gold Street, Chelsea.'

'Yes, I believe so. Anyhow, I congratulate you on your haul, and wish you a merry evening.' And the two men parted.

Dorrington had, indeed, a few pounds to draw as a result of his 'fishing' bet with Naylor, but now he resolved to ask for the money at his own time. This invitation to Telfer took his attention, and it reminded him oddly of the circumstances detailed in the report of the inquest on Lawrence, transcribed at the beginning of this paper. He had cut out this report at the time it appeared, because he saw certain singularities about the case, and he had filed it, as he had done hundred of other such cuttings. And now certain things led him to fancy that he might be much interested to observe the proceedings at Naylor's house on the evening

after a bad settling-day. He resolved to gratify himself with a strict professional watch in Gold Street that evening, on chance of something coming of it. For it was an important thing in Dorrington's rascally trade to get hold of as much of other people's private business as possible, and to know exactly in what cupboard to find every man's skeleton. For there was no knowing but it might be turned into money sooner or later. So he found the number of Naylor's house from the handiest directory, and at six o'clock, a little disguised by a humbler style of dress than usual, he began his watch.

Naylor's house was at the corner of a turning, with the flank wall blank of windows, except for one at the top; and a public-house stood at the opposite corner. Dorrington, skilled in watching without attracting attention to himself, now lounged in the public-house bar, now stood at the street corner, and now sauntered along the street, a picture of vacancy of mind, and looking, apparently, at everything in turn, except the house at the corner. The first thing he noted was the issuing forth from the area steps of a healthy-looking girl in much gaily beribboned finery. Plainly a servant taking an evening out. This was an odd thing, that a servant should be allowed out on an evening when a guest was expected to dinner; and the house looked like one where it was more likely that one servant would be kept than two. Dorrington hurried after the girl, and, changing his manner of address, to that of a civil labourer, said—

'Beg pardon, Miss, but is Mary Walker still in service at your 'ouse?'

'Mary Walker?' said the girl 'Why, no I never 'eard the name And there ain't nobody in service there but me.'

'Beg pardon—it must be the wrong 'ouse. It's my cousin, Miss, that's all '

Dorrington left the girl and returned to the public-house. As he reached it he perceived a second noticeable thing. Although it was broad daylight, there was now a light

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behind the solitary window at the top of the side-wall of Naylor's house. Dorrington slipped through the swing-doors of the public-house and watched through the glass.

It was a bare room behind the high window—it might have been a bathroom—and its interior was made but dimly visible from outside by the light. A tall, thin woman was setting up an ordinary pair of house-steps in the middle of the room. This done, she turned to the window and pulled down the blind, and as she did so Dorrington noted her very extreme thinness, both of face and body. When the blind was down the light still remained within. Again there seemed some significance in this. It appeared that the thin woman had waited until her servant had gone before doing whatever she had to do in that room. Presently the watcher came again into Gold Street, and from there caught a passing glimpse of the thin woman as she moved busily about the front room over the breakfast parlour.

Clearly, then, the light above had been left for future use. Dorrington thought for a minute, and then suddenly stopped, with a snap of the fingers. He saw it all now. Here was something altogether in his way. He would take a daring course.

He withdrew once more to the public-house, and ordering another drink, took up a position in a compartment from which he could command a view both of Gold Street and the side turning. The time now, he saw by his watch, was ten minutes to seven. He had to wait rather more than a quarter of an hour before seeing Richard Telfer come walking jauntily down Gold Street, mount the steps, and knock at Naylor's door. There was a momentary glimpse of the thin woman's face at the door, and then Telfer entered.

It now began to grow dusk, and in about twenty minutes more Dorrington took to the street again. The room over the breakfast-parlour was clearly the dining-room. It was lighted brightly, and by intent listening the watcher could distinguish, now and again, a sudden burst of laughter

from Telfer, followed by the deeper grunts of Naylor's voice, and once by sharp tones that it seemed natural to suppose were the thin woman's.

Dorrington waited no longer, but slipped a pair of thick sock-feet over his shoes, and, after a quick look along the two streets, to make sure nobody was near, he descended the area steps. There was no light in the breakfast-parlour. With his knife he opened the window-catch, raised the sash quietly and stepped over the sill, and stood in the dark room within.

All was quiet, except for the talking in the room above. He had done but what many thieves—'parlour-jumpers'—do every day; but there was more ahead. He made his way silently to the basement passage, and passed into the kitchen. The room was lighted, and cookery utensils were scattered about, but nobody was there. He waited till he heard a request in Naylor's gruff voice for 'another slice' of something, and noiselessly mounted the stairs. He noticed that the dining-room door was ajar, but passed quickly on to the second flight, and rested on the landing above. Mrs Naylor would probably have to go downstairs once or twice again, but he did not expect anybody in the upper part of the house just yet. There was a small flight of stairs above the landing whereon he stood, leading to the servant's bedroom and the bathroom. He took a glance at the bathroom with its feeble lamp, its steps, and its open ceiling-trap, and returned again to the bedroom landing. There he stood, waiting watchfully.

Twice the thin woman emerged from the dining-room, went downstairs and came up again, each time with food and plates. Then she went down once more, and was longer gone. Meantime Naylor and Telfer were talking and joking loudly at the table.

When once again Dorrington saw the crown of the thin woman's head rising over the bottom stair, he perceived that she bore a tray set with cups already filled with

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coffee. These she carried into the dining-room, whence presently came the sound of striking matches. After this the conversation seemed to flag, and Telfer's part in it grew less and less, till it ceased altogether, and the house was silent, except for a sound of heavy breathing. Soon this became almost a snore, and then there was a sudden noisy tumble, as of a drunken man; but still the snoring went on, and the Naylor's were talking in whispers.

There was a shuffling and heaving sound, and a chair was knocked over. Then at the dining-room door appeared Naylor, walking backward, and carrying the inert form of Telfer by the shoulders, while the thin woman followed, supporting the feet. Dorrington retreated up the small stair-flight, cocking a pocket revolver as he went.

Up the stairs they came, Naylor puffing and grunting with exertion, and Telfer still snoring soundly on, till at last, having mounted the top flight, they came in at the bath-room door, where Dorrington stood to receive them, smiling and bowing pleasantly, with his hat in one hand and his revolver in the other.

The woman, from her position, saw him first, and dropped Telfer's legs with a scream. Naylor turned his head and then also dropped his end. The drugged man fell in a heap, snoring still.

Naylor, astounded and choking, made as if to rush at the interloper, but Dorrington thrust the revolver into his face, and exclaimed, still smiling courteously, 'Mind, mind! It's a dangerous thing, is a revolver, and apt to go off if you run against it!'

He stood thus for a second, and then stepped forward and took the woman—who seemed like to swoon—by the arm, and pulled her into the room. 'Come, Mrs Naylor,' he said, 'you're not one of the fainting sort, and I think I'd better keep two such clever people as you under my eye, or one of you may get into mischief. Come now, Naylor, we'll talk business.'

Naylor, now white as a ghost, sat on the edge of the bath, and stared at Dorrington as though in a fascination of terror. His hands rested on the bath at each side, and an odd sound of gurgling came from his thick throat.

‘We will talk business,’ Dorrington resumed. ‘Come, you’ve met me before now you know—at Redbury. You can’t have forgotten Janissary, and the walking exercise and the handful of malt. I’m afraid you’re a clumsy sort of rascal, Naylor, though you do your best. I’m a rascal myself (though I don’t often confess it), and I assure you that your conceptions are crude as yet. Still, that isn’t a bad notion in its way, that of drugging a man and drowning him in your cistern up there in the roof, when you prefer not to pay him his winnings. It has the very considerable merit that, after the body has been fished out of any river you may choose to fling it into, the stupid coroner’s jury will never suspect that it was drowned in any other water but that. Just as happened in the Lawrence case, for instance. You remember that, eh? So do I, very well, and it was because I remembered that that I paid you this visit to-night. But you do the thing much too clumsily, really. When I saw a light up here in broad daylight I knew at once it must be left for some purpose to be executed later in the evening; and when I saw the steps carefully placed at the same time, after the servant had been sent out, why the thing was plain, remembering, as I did, the curious coincidence that Mr Lawrence was drowned the very evening he had been here to take away his winnings. The steps *must* be intended to give access to the roof, where there was probably a tank to feed the bath, and what more secret place to drown a man than there? And what easier place, so long as the man was well drugged, and there was a strong lid to the tank? As I say, Naylor, your notion was meritorious, but your execution was wretched—perhaps because you had no notion that I was watching you.’

He paused, and then went on. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘collect

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your scattered faculties, both of you. I shan't hand you over to the police for this little invention of yours; it's too useful an invention to give away to the police. I shan't hand you over, that is to say, as long as you do as I tell you. If you get mutinous, you shall hang, both of you, for the Lawrence business. I may as well tell you that I'm a bit of a scoundrel myself, by way of profession. I don't boast about it, but it's well to be frank in making arrangements of this sort. I'm going to take you into my service. I employ a few agents, and you and your tank may come in very handy from time to time. But we must set it up, with a few improvements, in another house—a house which hasn't quite such an awkward window. And we mustn't execute our little suppressions so regularly on settling-day; it looks suspicious. So as soon as you can get your faculties together we'll talk over this thing.'

The man and the woman had exchanged glances during this speech, and now Naylor asked, huskily, jerking his thumb toward the man on the floor, 'An'—an' what about 'im?'

'What about him? Why, get rid of him as soon as you like. Not that way, though.' (He pointed toward the ceiling trap.) 'It doesn't pay *me*, and I'm master now. Besides, what will people say when you tell the same tale at his inquest that you told at Lawrence's? No, my friend, bookmaking and murder don't assort together, profitable as the combination may seem. Settling-days are too regular. And I'm not going to be your accomplice, mind. You are going to be mine. Do what you please with Telfer. Leave him on somebody's doorstep if you like.'

'But I owe him fifteen hundred, and I am't got more than half of it! I'll be ruined!'

'Very likely,' Dorrington returned placidly. 'Be ruined as soon as possible, then, and devote all your time to my business. You're not to ornament the ring any longer, remember—you're to assist a private inquiry agent, you

and your wife and your charming tank. Repudiate the debt if you like—it's a mere gaming transaction, and there is no legal claim—or leave him in the street and tell him he's been robbed. Please yourself as to this little roguery—you may as well, for it's the last you will do on your own account. For the future your respectable talents will be devoted to the service of Dorrington & Hicks, private inquiry agents; and if you don't give satisfaction, that eminent firm will hang you, with the assistance of the judge at the Old Bailey. So settle your business yourselves, and quickly, for I've a good many things to arrange with you.'

And, Dorrington watching them continually, they took Telfer out by the side gate in the garden wall and left him in a dark corner.

Murder by Proxy

M. McD. Bodkin Q.C.

At two o'clock precisely on that sweltering 12th of August, Eric Neville, young, handsome, *debonair*, sauntered through the glass door down the wrought-iron staircase into the beautiful, old-fashioned garden of Berkly Manor, radiant in white flannel, with a broad-brimmed Panama hat perched lightly on his glossy black curls, for he had just come from lazing in his canoe along the shadiest stretches of the river, with a book for company.

The back of the Manor House was the south wall of the garden, which stretched away for nearly a mile, gay with blooming flowers and ripening fruit. The air, heavy with perfume, stole softly through all the windows, now standing wide open in the sunshine, as though the great house gasped for breath.

When Eric's trim, tan boot left the last step of the iron staircase it reached the broad gravelled walk of the garden. Fifty yards off the head gardener was tending his peaches, the smoke from his pipe hanging like a faint blue haze in the still air that seemed to quiver with the heat. Eric, as he reached him, held out a petitionary hand, too lazy to speak.

Without a word the gardener stretched for a huge peach that was striving to hide its red face from the sun under

narrow ribbed leaves, plucked it as though he loved it, and put it softly in the young man's hand.

Eric stripped off the velvet coat, rose-coloured, green, and amber, till it hung round the fruit in tatters, and made his sharp, white teeth meet in the juicy flesh of the ripe peach.

BANG!

The sudden shock of sound close to their ears wrenched the nerves of the two men; one dropped his peach, and the other his pipe. Both stared about them in utter amazement.

'Look there, sir,' whispered the gardener, pointing to a little cloud of smoke oozing lazily through a window almost directly over their head, while the pungent spice of gun-powder made itself felt in the hot air.

'My uncle's room,' gasped Eric. 'I left him only a moment ago fast asleep on the sofa.'

He turned as he spoke, and ran like a deer along the garden walk, up the iron steps, and back through the glass door into the house, the old gardener following as swiftly as his rheumatism would allow.

Eric crossed the sitting-room on which the glass door opened, went up the broad, carpeted staircase four steps at a time, turned sharply to the right down a broad corridor, and burst straight through the open door of his uncle's study.

Fast as he had come, there was another before him. A tall, strong figure, dressed in light tweed, was bending over the sofa where, a few minutes before, Eric had seen his uncle asleep.

Eric recognized the broad back and brown hair at once.

'John,' he cried, 'John, what is it?'

His cousin turned to him a handsome, manly face, ghastly pale now even to the lips.

'Eric, my boy,' he answered falteringly, 'this is too awful. Uncle has been murdered—shot stone dead.'

'No, no; it cannot be. It's not five minutes since I saw

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him quietly sleeping,' Eric began. Then his eyes fell on the still figure on the sofa, and he broke off abruptly.

Squire Neville lay with his face to the wall, only the outline of his strong, hard features visible. The charge of shot had entered at the base of the skull, the grey hair was all dabbled with blood, and the heavy, warm drops still fell slowly on to the carpet.

'But who can have . . .' Eric gasped out, almost speechless with horror.

'It must have been his own gun,' his cousin answered. 'It was lying there on the table, to the right, barrel still smoking, when I came in.'

'It wasn't suicide—was it?' asked Eric, in a frightened whisper.

'Quite impossible, I should say. You see where he is hit.'

'But it was so sudden. I ran the moment I heard the shot, and you were before me. Did you see anyone?'

'Not a soul. The room was empty.'

'But how could the murderer escape?'

'Perhaps he leapt through the window. It was open when I came in.'

'He couldn't do that, Master John.' It was the voice of the gardener at the door. Me and Master Eric was right under the window when the shot came.'

'Then how in the devil's name did he disappear, Simpson?'

'It's not for me to say, sir.'

John Neville searched the room with eager eyes. There was no cover in it for a cat. A bare, plain room, panelled with brown oak, on which hung some guns and fishing-rods—old fashioned for the most part, but of the finest workmanship and material. A small bookcase in the corner was the room's sole claim to be called 'a study'. The huge leather-covered sofa on which the corpse lay, a massive round table in the centre of the room, and a few heavy chairs completed the furniture. The dust lay thick on everything, the fierce

sunshine streamed in a broad band across the room. The air was stifling with the heat and the acrid smoke of gunpowder.

John Neville noticed how pale his young cousin was. He laid his hand on his shoulder with the protecting kindness of an elder brother.

‘Come, Eric,’ he said softly, ‘we can do no good here.’

‘We had best look round first, hadn’t we, for some clue?’ asked Eric, and he stretched his hand towards the gun; but John stopped him.

‘No, no,’ he cried hastily, ‘we must leave things just as we find them. I’ll send a man to the village for Wardle and telegraph to London for a detective.’

He drew his young cousin gently from the room, locked the door on the outside and put the key in his pocket.

‘Who shall I wire to?’ John Neville called from his desk with pencil poised over the paper, to his cousin, who sat at the library table with his head buried in his hands ‘It will need be a sharp man—one who can give his whole time to it.’

‘I don’t know any one. Yes, I do That fellow with the queer name that found the Duke of Southern’s opal—Beck. That’s it. Thornton Crescent, W C., will find him.’

John Neville filled in the name and address to the telegram he had already written—

‘Come at once. Case of murder. Expense no object. John Neville, Berkly Manor, Dorset.’

Little did Eric guess that the filling in of that name was to him a matter of life or death.

John Neville had picked up a time-table and rustled through the leaves ‘Hard lines, Eric,’ he said, ‘do his best, he cannot get here before midnight. But here’s Wardle already, anyhow, that’s quick work’

A shrewd, silent man was Wardle, the local constable, who now came briskly up the broad avenue; strong and active too, though well over fifty years of age.

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John Neville met him at the door with the news. But the groom had already told of the murder.

'You did the right thing to lock the door, sir,' said Wardle, as they passed into the library where Eric still sat apparently unconscious of their presence, 'and you wired for a right good man. I've worked with this here Mr Beck before now. A pleasant man and a lucky one. "No hurry, Mr Wardle," he says to me, "and no fuss. Stir nothing. The things about the corpse have always a story of their own if they are let tell it, and I always like to have the first quiet little chat with them myself".'

So the constable held his tongue and kept his hands quiet and used his eyes and ears, while the great house buzzed with gossip. There was a whisper here and a whisper there, and the whispers patched themselves into a story. By slow degrees dark suspicion settled down and closed like a cloud round John Neville.

Its influence seemed to pass in some strange fashion through the closed doors of the library. John began pacing the room restlessly from end to end.

After a little while the big room was not big enough to hold his impatience. He wandered out aimlessly, as it seemed, from one room to another; now down the iron steps to gaze vacantly at the window of his uncle's room, now past the locked door in the broad corridor.

With an elaborate pretence of carelessness Wardle kept him in sight through all his wanderings, but John Neville seemed too self-absorbed to notice it.

Presently he returned to the library. Eric was there, still sitting with his back to the door, only the top of his head showing over the high chair. He seemed absorbed in thought or sleep, he sat so still.

But he started up with a quick cry, showing a white, frightened face, when John touched him lightly on the arm.

'Come for a walk in the grounds, Eric?' he said. 'This

waiting and watching and doing nothing is killing work; I cannot stand it much longer.'

'I'd rather not, if you don't mind,' Eric answered wearily, 'I feel completely knocked over.'

'A mouthful of fresh air would do you good, my poor boy; you do look done up'

Eric shook his head.

'Well, I'm off,' John said.

'If you leave me the key, I will give it to the detective, if he comes.'

'Oh, he cannot be here before midnight, and I'll be back in an hour'

As John Neville walked rapidly down the avenue without looking back, Wardle stepped quietly after, keeping him well in view.

Presently Neville turned abruptly in amongst the woods, the constable still following cautiously. The trees stood tall and well apart, and the slanting sunshine made lanes of vivid green through the shade. As Wardle crossed between Neville and the sun his shadow fell long and black on the bright green.

John Neville saw the shadow move in front of him and turned sharp round and faced his pursuer.

The constable stood stock still and stared.

'Well, Wardle, what is it? Don't stand there like a fool fingering your baton! Speak out, man—what do you want of me?'

'You see how it is, Master John,' the constable stammered out, 'I don't believe it myself. I've known you twenty-one years—since you were born, I may say—and I don't believe it, not a blessed word of it But duty is duty, and I must go through with it; and facts is facts, and you and he had words last night, and Master Eric found you first in the room when . . .'

John Neville listened, bewildered at first. Then suddenly, as it seemed to dawn on him for the first time that he *could*

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be suspected of this murder, he kindled a sudden hot blaze of anger

He turned fiercely on the constable. Broad-chested, strong limbed, he towered over him, terrible in his wrath; his hands clenched, his muscles quivered, his strong white teeth shut tight as a rat-trap, and a reddish light shining at the back of his brown eyes.

‘How dare you! how dare you!’ he hissed out between his teeth, his passion choking him.

He looked dangerous, that roused young giant, but Wardle met his angry eyes without flinching.

‘Where’s the use, Master John?’ he said soothingly. ‘It’s main hard on you, I know. But the fault isn’t mine, and you won’t help yourself by taking it that way.’

The gust of passion appeared to sweep by as suddenly as it arose. The handsome face cleared and there was no trace of anger in the frank voice that answered. ‘You are right, Wardle, quite right. What is to be done next? Am I to consider myself under arrest?’

‘Better not, sir. You’ve got things to do a prisoner couldn’t do handy, and I don’t want to stand in the way of your doing them. If you give me your word it will be enough.’

‘My word for what?’

‘That you’ll be here when wanted.’

‘Why, man, you don’t think I’d be fool enough—innocent or guilty—to run away. My God! run away from a charge of murder!’

‘Don’t take on like that, sir. There’s a man coming from London that will set things straight, you’ll see. Have I your word?’

‘You have my word.’

‘Perhaps you’d better be getting back to the house, sir. There’s a deal of talking going on amongst the servants I’ll keep out of the way, and no one will be the wiser for anything that has passed between us.’

Half-way up the avenue a fast-driven dog-cart overtook John Neville, and pulled up so sharply that the horse's hoofs sent the coarse gravel flying. A stout, thick-set man, who up to that had been in close chat with the driver, leapt out more lightly than could have been expected from his figure.

'Mr John Neville, I presume? My name is Beck—Mr Paul Beck.'

'Mr Beck! Why, I thought you couldn't have got here before midnight.'

'Special train,' Mr Beck answered pleasantly. 'Your wire said "Expense no object". Well, time is an object, and comfort is an object too, more or less, in all these cases, so I took a special train, and here I am. With your permission, we will send the trap on and walk to the house together. This seems a bad business, Mr Neville. Shot dead, the driver tells me. Any one suspected?'

'I'm suspected.' The answer broke from John Neville's lips almost fiercely.

Mr Beck looked at him for a minute with placid curiosity, without a touch of surprise in it.

'How do you know that?'

'Wardle, the local constable, has just told me so to my face. It was only by way of a special favour he refrained from arresting me then and there.'

Mr Beck walked on beside John Neville ten or fifteen paces before he spoke again.

'Do you mind,' he said, in a very insinuating voice, 'telling me exactly why you are suspected?'

'Not in the very least.'

'Mind this,' the detective went on quickly, 'I give you no caution and make you no pledge. It's my business to find out the truth. If you think the truth will help you, then you ought to help me. This is very irregular, of course, but I don't mind that. When a man is charged with a crime there is, you see, Mr Neville, always one witness who knows

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whether he is guilty or not. There is very often only that one. The first thing the British law does by way of discovering the truth is to close the mouth of the only witness that knows it. Well, that's not my way. I like to give an innocent man a chance to tell his own story, and I've no scruple in trapping a guilty man if I can.'

He looked John Neville straight in the eyes as he spoke.

The look was steadily returned. 'I think I understand. What do you want to know? Where shall I begin?'

'At the beginning. What did you quarrel with your uncle about yesterday?'

John Neville hesitated for a moment, and Mr Beck took a mental note of his hesitation.

'I didn't quarrel with him. He quarrelled with me. It was this way: There was a bitter feud between my uncle and his neighbour, Colonel Peyton. The estates adjoin, and the quarrel was about some shooting. My uncle was very violent—he used to call Colonel Peyton "a common poacher." Well, I took no hand in the row. I was rather shy when I met the Colonel for the first time after it, for I knew my uncle had the wrong end of the stick. But the Colonel spoke to me in the kindest way. "No reason why you and I should cease to be friends, John," he said. "This is a foolish business. I would give the best covert on my estate to be out of it. Men cannot fight duels in these days, and gentlemen cannot scold like fishwives. But I don't expect people will call me a coward because I hate a row."

"Not likely," I said.

'The Colonel, you must know, had distinguished himself in a dozen engagements, and has the Victoria Cross locked up in a drawer of his desk. Lucy once showed it to me. Lucy is his only daughter, and he is devoted to her. Well, after that, of course, the Colonel and I kept on good terms, for I liked him, and I like going there and all that. But our friendship angered my uncle. I had been going to the Grange pretty often of late, and my uncle heard of it. He

spoke to me in a very rough fashion of Colonel Peyton and his daughter at dinner last night, and I stood up for them.

“By what right, you insolent puppy,” he shouted, “do you take this upstart’s part against me?”

“The Peytons are as good a family as our own, sir,” I said—that was true—“and as for right, Miss Lucy Peyton has done me the honour of promising to be my wife.”

‘At that he exploded in a very tempest of rage. I cannot repeat his words about the Colonel and his daughter. Even now, though he lies dead yonder, I can hardly forgive them. He swore he would never see or speak to me again if I disgraced myself by such a marriage. “I cannot break the entail,” he growled, “worse luck. But I can make you a beggar while I live, and I shall live forty years to spite you. The poacher can have you a bargain for all I care. Go, sell yourself as dearly as you can, and live on your wife’s fortune as soon as you please.”’

‘Then I lost my temper, and gave him a bit of my mind.’

‘Try and remember what you said; it’s important.’

‘I told him that I cast his contempt back in his face, that I loved Lucy Peyton, and that I would live for her, and die for her, if need be.’

‘Did you say “it was a comfort he could not live for ever”? You see the story of your quarrel has travelled far and near. The driver told me of it. Try and remember—did you say that?’

‘I think I did I’m sure I did now, but I was so furious I hardly knew what I said. I certainly never meant . . .’

‘Who was in the room when you quarrelled?’

‘Only Cousin Eric and the butler.’

‘The butler, I suppose, spread the story?’

‘I suppose so. I’m sure Cousin Eric never did. He was as much pained at the scene as myself He tried to interfere at the time, but his interference only made my uncle more furious.’

‘What was your allowance from your uncle?’

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'A thousand a year.'

'He had power to cut it off, I suppose?'

'Certainly.'

'But he had no power over the estate. You were heir-apparent under the entail, and at the present moment you are owner of Berkly Manor?'

'That is so; but up to the moment you spoke I assure you I never even remembered . . .'

'Who comes next to you in the entail?'

'My first cousin, Eric. He is four years younger than I am.'

'After him?'

'A distant cousin. I scarcely know him at all; but he has a bad reputation, and I know my uncle and he hated each other cordially.'

'How did your uncle and your cousin hit it off?'

'Not too well. He hated Eric's father—his own youngest brother—and he was sometimes rough on Eric. He used to abuse the dead father in the son's presence, calling him cruel and treacherous, and all that. Poor Eric had often had a hard time of it. Uncle was liberal to him so far as money went—as liberal as he was to me—had him to live at the Manor and denied him nothing. But now and again he would sting the poor lad by a passionate curse or a bitter sneer. It spite of all, Eric seemed fond of him.'

'To come now to the murder; you saw your uncle no more that night, I suppose?'

'I never saw him alive again.'

'Do you know what he did next day?'

'Only by hearsay.'

'Hearsay evidence is often first-class evidence, though the law doesn't think so. What did you hear?'

'My uncle was mad about shooting. Did I tell you his quarrel with Colonel Peyton was about the shooting? He had a grouse moor rented about twelve miles from here, and he never missed the first day. He was off at cock-shout with the head gamekeeper, Lennox. I was to have gone with him,

but I didn't of course. Contrary to his custom he came back about noon and went straight to his study. I was writing in my own room and heard his heavy step go past the door. Later on Eric found him asleep on the great leather couch in his study. Five minutes after Eric left I heard the shot and rushed into his room.'

'Did you examine the room after you found the body?'

'No. Eric wanted to, but I thought it better not. I simply locked the door and put the key in my pocket till you came.'

'Could it have been suicide?'

'Impossible, I should say. He was shot through the back of the head.'

'Had your uncle any enemies that you know of?'

'The poachers hated him. He was relentless with them. A fellow once shot at him, and my uncle shot back and shattered the man's leg. He had him sent to hospital first and cured, and then prosecuted him straight away, and got him two years.'

'Then you think a poacher murdered him?' Mr Beck said blandly.

'I don't well see how he could. I was in my own room on the same corridor. The only way to or from my uncle's room was past my door. I rushed out the instant I heard the shot, and saw no one.'

'Perhaps the murderer leapt through the window?'

'Eric tells me that he and the gardener were in the garden almost under the window at the time.'

'What's your theory, then, Mr Neville?'

'I haven't got a theory.'

'You parted with your uncle in anger last night?'

'That's so.'

'Next day your uncle is shot, and you are found—I won't say caught—in his room the instant afterwards.'

John Neville flushed crimson, but he held himself in and nodded without speaking

The two walked on together in silence.

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They were not a hundred yards from the great mansion—John Neville's house—standing high above the embowering trees in the glow of the twilight, when the detective spoke again.

'I'm bound to say, Mr Neville, that things look very black against you, as they stand. I think that constable Wardle ought to have arrested you.'

'It's not too late yet,' John Neville answered shortly, 'I see him there at the corner of the house and I'll tell him you said so.'

He turned on his heel, when Mr Beck called quickly after him: 'What about that key?'

John Neville handed it to him without a word. The detective took it as silently and walked on to the entrance and up the great stone steps alone, whistling softly.

Eric welcomed him at the door, for the driver had told of his coming.

'You have had no dinner, Mr Beck?' he asked courteously.

'Business first; pleasure afterwards. I had a snack in the train. Can I see the gamekeeper, Lennox, for five minutes alone?'

'Certainly. I'll send him to you in a moment here in the library.'

Lennox, the gamekeeper, a long-limbed, high-shouldered, elderly man, shambled shyly into the room, consumed by nervousness in the presence of a London detective.

'Sit down, Lennox, sit down,' said Mr Beck kindly. The very sound of his voice, homely and good-natured, put the man at ease. 'Now, tell me, why did you come home so soon from the grouse this morning?'

'Well, you see, sir, it was this ways. We were two hours hout when the Squire, 'e says to me, "Lennox," 'e says, "I'm sick of this fooling. I'm going 'ome."''

'No sport?'

'Birds wor as thick as blackberries, sir, and lay like larks.'

‘No sportsman, then?’

‘Is it the Squire, sir?’ cried Lennox, quite forgetting his shyness in his excitement at this slur on the Squire. ‘There wasn’t a better sportsman in the county—no, nor as good. Real, old-fashioned style, ’e was. “Hang your barnyard shooting,” ’e’d say when they’d ask him to go kill tame pheasants. ’E put up ’is own birds with ’is own dogs, ’e did. ’E’d as soon go shooting without a gun very near as without a dog any day. Aye and ’e stuck to ’is old “Manton” muzzle-loader to the last. “’Old it steady, Lennox,” ’ed say to me oftentimes, “and point it straight. It will hit harder and further than any of their telescopes, and it won’t get marked with rust if you don’t clean it every second shot.”

“Easy to load, Squire,” the young men would say, cracking up their hammerless breech-loaders.

“Aye,” he’d answer them back, “and spoil your dog’s work. What’s the good of a dog learning to ‘down shot,’ if you can drop in your cartridges as quick as a cock can pick corn.”

‘A dead shot the Squire was, too, and no mistake, sir, if he wasn’t flurried. Many a time I’ve seen him wipe the eyes of gents who thought no end of themselves with that same old muzzle-loader that shot hussell in the long run. Many a time I seen . . .’

‘Why did he turn his back on good sport yesterday?’ asked Mr Beck, cutting short his reminiscences.

‘Well, you see, it was scorching hot for one thing, but that wasn’t it, for the infernal fire would not stop the Squire if he was on for sport. But he was in a blazing temper all the morning, and temper tells more than most anything on a man’s shooting. When Flora sprung a pack—she’s a young dog, and the fault wasn’t hers either—for she came down the wind on them—but the Squire had the gun to his shoulder to shoot her. Five minutes after she found another pack and set like a stone. They got up as big as haycocks and as

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lazy as crows, and he missed right and left—never touched a feather—a thing I haven't seen him do since I was a boy.

“It's myself I should shoot, not the dog” he growled and he flung me the gun to load. When I'd got the caps on and had shaken the powder into the nipples, he ripped out an oath that 'e'd have no more of it. 'E walked right across country to where the trap was. The birds got up under his feet, but divil a shot he'd fire, but drove straight 'ome.

‘When we got to the 'ouse I wanted to take the gun and fire it off, or draw the charges. But 'e told me to go to . . .’ and carried it up loaded as it was to his study, where no one goes unless they're sent for special. It was better than an hour afterwards I heard the report of the “Manton”; I'd know it in a thousand. I ran for the study as fast as . . .’

Eric Neville broke suddenly into the room, flushed and excited.

‘Mr Beck,’ he cried, ‘a monstrous thing has happened. Wardle, the local constable, you know, has arrested my cousin on a charge of wilful murder of my uncle.’

Mr Beck, with his eyes intent on the excited face, waved a big hand soothingly.

‘Easy,’ he said, ‘take it easy, Mr Neville. It's hurtful to your feelings, no doubt; but it cannot be helped. The constable has done no more than his duty. The evidence is very strong, as you know, and in such cases it's best for all parties to proceed regularly.’

‘You can go,’ he went on, speaking to Lennox, who stood dumbfounded at the news of John Neville's arrest, staring with eyes and mouth wide open.

Then turning again very quietly to Eric: ‘Now, Mr Neville, I would like to see the room where the corpse is.’

The perfect flaccidity of his manner had its effect upon the boy, for he was little more than a boy, calming his excitement as oil smooths troubled water.

‘My cousin has the key,’ he said, ‘I will get it.’

‘There is no need,’ Mr Beck called after him, for he was

half-way out of the room on his errand: 'I've got the key if you will be good enough to show me the room.'

Mastering his surprise, Eric showed him upstairs, and along the corridor to the locked door. Half unconsciously, as it seemed, he was following the detective into the room, when Mr Beck stopped him.

'I know you will kindly humour me, Mr Neville,' he said, 'but I find that I can look closer and think clearer when I'm by myself. I'm not exactly shy you know, but it's a habit I've got.'

He closed the door softly as he spoke, and locked it on the inside, leaving the key in the lock.

The mask of placidity fell from him the moment he found himself alone. His lips tightened, and his eyes sparkled, and his muscles seemed to grow rigid with excitement, like a sporting dog's when he is close upon the game.

One glance at the corpse showed him that it was not suicide. In this, at least, John Neville had spoken the truth.

The back of the head had literally been blown in by the charge of heavy shot at close quarters. The grey hair was clammy and matted, with little white angles of bone protruding. The dropping of the blood had made a black pool on the carpet, and the close air of the room was foetid with the smell of it.

The detective walked to the table where the gun, a handsome, old-fashioned muzzle loader, lay, the muzzle still pointed at the corpse. But his attention was diverted by a water-bottle, a great globe of clear glass quite full, and perched on a book a little distance from the gun, and between it and the window. He took it from the table and tested the water with the tip of his tongue. It had a curious insipid, parboiled taste, but he detected no foreign flavour in it. Though the room was full of dust there was almost none on the cover of the book where the water-bottle stood, and Mr Beck noticed a gap in the third row of the bookcase where the book had been taken.

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After a quick glance round the room Mr Beck walked to the window. On a small table there he found a clear circle in the thick dust. He fitted the round bottom of the water-bottle to this circle and it covered it exactly. While he stood by the window he caught sight of some small scraps of paper crumbled up and thrown into a corner. Picking them up and smoothing them out he found they were curiously drilled with little burnt holes. Having examined the holes minutely with his magnifying glass, he slipped these scraps folded one on each other into his waistcoat pocket.

From the window he went back to the gun. This time he examined it with the minutest care. The right barrel he found had been recently discharged, the left was still loaded. Then he made a startling discovery. *Both barrels were on half cock.* The little bright copper cap twinkled on the nipple of the left barrel, from the right nipple the cap was gone.

How had the murderer fired the right barrel without a cap? How and why did he find time in the midst of his deadly work to put the cock back to safety?

Had Mr Beck solved this problem? The grim smile deepened on his lips as he looked, and there was an ugly light in his eyes that boded ill for the unknown assassin. Finally he carried the gun to the window and examined it carefully through a magnifying glass. There was a thin dark line, as if traced with the point of a red-hot needle, running a little way along the wood of the stock and ending in the right nipple.

Mr Beck put the gun back quietly on the table. The whole investigation had not taken ten minutes. He gave one look at the still figure on the couch, unlocked the door, locking it after him, and walked out through the corridor, the same cheerful imperturbable Mr Beck that had walked into it ten minutes before.

He found Eric waiting for him at the head of the stairs. 'Well?' he said when he saw the detective.

‘Well,’ replied Mr Beck, ignoring the interrogation in his voice, ‘when is the inquest to be? That’s the next thing to be thought of; the sooner the better.’

‘To-morrow, if you wish. My cousin John sent a messenger to Mr Morgan, the coroner. He lives only five miles off, and he has promised to be here at twelve o’clock to-morrow. There will be no difficulty in getting a jury in the village.’

‘That’s right, that’s all right,’ said Mr Beck, rubbing his hands, ‘the sooner and the quieter we get those preliminaries over the better.’

‘I have just sent to engage the local solicitor on behalf of my cousin. He’s not particularly bright, I’m afraid, but he’s the best to be had on a short notice.’

‘Very proper and thoughtful on your part—very thoughtful indeed. But solicitors cannot do much in such cases. It’s the evidence we have to go by, and the evidence is only too plain, I’m afraid. Now, if you please,’ he went on more briskly, dismissing the disagreeable subject, as it were, with a wave of his hand, ‘I’d be very glad of that supper you spoke about.’

Mr Beck supped very heartily on a brace of grouse—the last of the dead man’s shooting—and a bottle of ripe Burgundy. He was in high good-humour, and across ‘the walnuts and the wine’ he told Eric some startling episodes in his career, which seemed to divert the young fellow a little from his manifest grief for his uncle and anxiety for his cousin.

Meanwhile John Neville remained shut close in his own room, with the constable at the door.

The inquest was held at half-past twelve next day in the library

The Coroner, a large, red-faced man, with a very affable manner, had got to his work promptly

The jury ‘viewed the body’ steadily, stolidly, with a kind of morose delectation in the grim spectacle.

In some unaccountable way Mr Beck constituted him-

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self a master of the ceremonies, a kind of assessor to the court.

'You had best take the gun down,' he said to the Coroner as they were leaving the room.

'Certainly, certainly,' replied the Coroner.

'And the water-bottle,' added Mr Beck.

'There is no suspicion of poison, is there?'

'It's best not to take anything for granted,' replied Mr Beck sententiously.

'By all means if you think so,' replied the obsequious Coroner. 'Constable, take the water-bottle down with you.'

The large room was filled with the people of the neighbourhood, mostly farmers from the Berkly estate and small shopkeepers from the neighbouring village.

A table had been wheeled to the top of the room for the Coroner, with a seat at it for the ubiquitous local newspaper correspondent. A double row of chairs were set at the right hand of the table for the jury.

The jury had just returned from viewing the body when the crunch of wheels and hoofs was heard on the gravel of the drive, and a two-horse phaeton pulled up sharp at the entrance.

A moment later there came into the room a handsome, soldier-like man, with a girl clinging to his arm, whom he supported with tender, protecting fondness that was very touching. The girl's face was pale, but wonderfully sweet and winsome; cheeks with the faint, pure flush of the wild rose, and eyes like a wild fawn's.

No need to tell Mr Beck that here were Colonel Peyton and his daughter. He saw the look—shy, piteous, loving—that the girl gave John Neville as she passed close to the table where he sat with his head buried in his hands; and the detective's face darkened for a moment with a stern purpose, but the next moment it resumed its customary look of good-nature and good-humour.

The gardener, the gamekeeper, and the butler were

briefly examined by the Coroner, and rather clumsily cross-examined by Mr Waggles, the solicitor whom Eric had thoughtfully secured for his cousin's defence.

As the case against John Neville gradually darkened into grim certainty, the girl in the far corner of the room grew white as a lily, and would have fallen but for her father's support.

'Does Mr John Neville offer himself for examination?' said the Coroner, as he finished writing the last word of the butler's deposition describing the quarrel of the night before.

'No, sir,' said Mr Waggles. 'I appear for Mr John Neville, the accused, and we reserve our defence.'

'I really have nothing to say that hasn't been already said,' added John Neville quietly.

'Mr Neville,' said Mr Waggles pompously, 'I must ask you to leave yourself entirely in my hands.'

'Eric Neville!' called out the Coroner. 'This is the last witness, I think.'

Eric stepped in front of the table and took the Bible in his hand. He was pale, but quiet and composed, and there was an unaffected grief in the look of his dark eyes and in the tone of his soft voice that touched every heart—except one.

He told his story shortly and clearly. It was quite plain that he was most anxious to shield his cousin. But in spite of this, perhaps because of this, the evidence went horribly against John Neville.

The answers to questions criminating his cousin had to be literally dragged from him by the Coroner.

With manifest reluctance he described the quarrel at dinner the night before.

'Was your cousin very angry?' the Coroner asked.

'He would not be human if he were not angry at the language used.'

'What did he say?'

'I cannot remember all he said'

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'Did he say to your uncle: "Well, you will not live for ever"?''

No answer.

'Come, Mr Neville, remember you are sworn to tell the truth.'

In an almost inaudible whisper came the words: 'He did.'

'I'm sorry to pain you, but I must do my duty. When you heard the shot you ran straight to your uncle's room, about fifty yards, I believe?'

'About that.'

'Whom did you find there bending over the dead man?'

'My cousin. I am bound to say he appeared in the deepest grief.'

'But you saw no one else?'

'No.'

'Your cousin is, I believe, the heir to Squire Neville's property; the owner I should say now?'

'I believe so.'

'That will do; you can stand down.'

This interchange of question and answer, each one of which seemed to fit the rope tighter and tighter round John Neville's neck, was listened to with hushed eagerness by the room full of people.

There was a long, deep drawing-in of breath when it ended. The suspense seemed over, but not the excitement.

Mr Beck rose as Eric turned from the table, quite as a matter of course, to question him.

'You say you *believe* your cousin was your uncle's heir—don't you *know* it?'

Then Mr Waggles found his voice.

'Really, sir,' he broke out, addressing the Coroner, 'I must protest. This is grossly irregular. This person is not a professional gentleman. He represents no one. He has no *locus standi* in court at all.'

No one knew better than Mr Beck that technically he had no title to open his lips; but his look of quiet assurance,

his calm assumption of unmistakable right, carried the day with the Coroner.

‘Mr Beck,’ he said, ‘has, I understand, been brought down specially from London to take charge of this case, and I shall certainly not stop him in any question he may desire to ask’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Mr Beck, in the tone of a man whose clear right has been allowed. Then again to the witness: ‘Didn’t you know John Neville was next heir to Berkly Manor?’

‘I know it, of course.’

‘And if John Neville is hanged you will be the owner?’

Every one was startled at the frank brutality of the question so blandly asked. Mr Waggles bobbed up and down excitedly; but Eric answered, calmly as ever.

‘That’s very coarsely and cruelly put.’

‘But it’s true?’

‘Yes, it’s true.’

‘We will pass from that. When you came into the room after the murder, did you examine the gun?’

‘I stretched out my hand to take it, but my cousin stopped me. I must be allowed to add that I believe he was actuated, as he said, by a desire to keep everything in the room untouched. He locked the door and carried off the key. I was not in the room afterwards.’

‘Did you look closely at the gun?’

‘Not particularly.’

‘Did you notice that both barrels were at half cock?’

‘No.’

‘Did you notice that there was no cap on the nipple of the right barrel that had just been fired?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘That is to say you did not notice it?’

‘Yes’

‘Did you notice a little burnt line traced a short distance on the wood of the stock towards the right nipple?’

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‘No.’

Mr Beck put the gun into his hand.

‘Look close. Do you notice it now?’

‘I can see it now for the first time.’

‘You cannot account for it, I suppose?’

‘No.’

‘Sure?’

‘Quite sure.’

All present followed this strange, and apparently purposeless cross-examination with breathless interest, groping vainly for its meaning.

The answers were given calmly and clearly, but those that looked closely saw that Eric’s nether lip quivered, and it was only by a strong effort of will that he held his calmness.

Through the blandness of Mr Beck’s voice and manner a subtle suggestion of hostility made itself felt, very trying to the nerves of the witness.

‘We will pass from that,’ said Mr Beck again. ‘When you went into your uncle’s room before the shot why did you take a book from the shelf and put it on the table?’

‘I really cannot remember anything about it.’

‘Why did you take the water-bottle from the window and stand it on the book?’

‘I wanted a drink.’

‘But there was none of the water drunk.’

‘Then I suppose it was to take it out of the strong sun.’

‘But you set it in the strong sun on the table?’

‘Really I cannot remember those trivialities.’ His self-control was breaking down at last.

‘Then we will pass from that,’ said Mr Beck a third time.

He took the little scraps of paper with the burnt holes through them from his waistcoat pocket, and handed them to the witness.

‘Do you know anything about these?’

There was a pause of a second. Eric’s lips tightened as if

with a sudden spasm of pain. But the answer came clearly enough.

‘Nothing whatever.’

‘Do you ever amuse yourself with a burning glass?’

This seeming simple question was snapped suddenly at the witness like a pistol-shot.

‘Really, really,’ Mr Waggles broke out, ‘this is mere trifling with the Court.’

‘That question does certainly seem a little irrelevant, Mr Beck’ mildly remonstrated the Coroner.

‘Look at the witness, sir,’ retorted Mr Beck sternly. ‘He does not think it irrelevant.’

Every eye in court was turned on Eric’s face and fixed there.

All colour had fled from his cheeks and lips; his mouth had fallen open, and he stared at Mr Beck with eyes of abject terror.

Mr Beck went on remorselessly. ‘Did you ever amuse yourself with a burning glass?’

No answer.

‘Do you know that a water-bottle like this makes a capital burning glass?’

Still no answer.

‘Do you know that a burning glass has been used before now to touch off a cannon or fire a gun?’

Then a voice broke from Eric at last, as it seemed in defiance of his will, a voice unlike his own—loud, harsh, hardly articulate, such a voice might have been heard in the torture chamber in the old days when the strain on the rack grew unbearable.

‘You devilish bloodhound!’ he shouted. ‘Curse you, curse you, you’ve caught me! I confess it—I was the murderer!’ He fell on the ground in a fit.

‘And you made the sun your accomplice!’ remarked Mr Beck, placid as ever

was a fat little man, with a healthy red face and shrewd twinkling eyes. Introducing himself as Luke Horval, of the detective service, he asked Hagar to relate the circumstances of the pawning. This the girl did frankly enough, but without communicating her own suspicions. At the conclusion of her narrative she displayed the amber beads, which were carefully examined by Mr Horval. Then he slapped his knee, and whistled in a thoughtful sort of way.

‘I guessed as much,’ said he, staring hard at Hagar. ‘The negress did it.’

‘Did what?’ asked the girl, curiously.

‘Why,’ said Horval, ‘murdered the old woman.’

Murder! The word had a gruesome and cruel sound, which caused Hagar’s cheek to pale when it rang in her ears. She had connected the amber beads with robbery, but scarcely with the taking of life. The idea that she had been in the company of a murderess gave Hagar a qualm, but, suppressing this as a weakness, she asked Horval to tell her the details of the crime and how it bore on the pawning of the amber beads.

‘It’s just this way, miss,’ explained the detective, easily. ‘This Rosa is the nigger girl of Mrs Arryford . . .’

‘Is Rosa her real name?’

‘Oh, yes, I s’pose she thought she might lose the beads if she gave a wrong one; but the address an’t right. It’s the other end of London as Mrs Arryford lives—or rather lived,’ added Horval, correcting himself, ‘seeing she now occupies a Kensal Green grave—Campden Hill, miss; a sweet little house in Bedford Gardens, where she lived with Rosa and Miss Lyle.’

‘And who is Miss Lyle?’

‘The companion of Mrs Arryford. A dry stick of a spinster, miss, not to be compared with a fine girl like you.’

Hagar did not deign to notice the compliment, but sharply requested Mr Horval to continue his story, which he did, in no wise abashed by her cold demeanour.

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possess. For the moment Hagar was inclined to refuse to do business; but a glance at the amber beads decided her to make the bargain. She could get it cheap; she was acting well within the legal limits of business; and if the police did appear in the matter, no blame could be attached to her for the transaction. Biased by these considerations, Hagar made out the ticket in the name Rosa, and took a clean new five-pound note out of the cash-box. As she was about to give ticket and money across the counter she paused. 'I'll take the number of this note,' she thought, going to the desk, 'if this negress can't be traced by name or address, the bank-note number will find her if it is necessary.'

Deeming this precaution judicious, Hagar hastily scribbled down the number of the five-pound note, and returning to the counter, gave it and the ticket to her queer customer. The negress stretched out her right hand for them; and then Hagar made a discovery which she noted mentally as a mark of identification if necessary. However, she said nothing, but tried to get a good look at the woman's face. The customer, however, kept well in the shadow, and swept note and ticket into her bag hurriedly. Then she bowed and left the shop.

Six days later Hagar received a printed notice from New Scotland Yard, notifying to all pawn-brokers that the police were in search of a necklace of amber beads set with diamonds, and clasped with a negro's face wrought in gold. Notice of its whereabouts was to be sent to the Detective Department without delay. Remembering her suspicions, and recalling the persistent way in which the negress had averted her face, Hagar was not much surprised by this communication. Curious to know the truth, and to learn what crime might be attached to the necklace, she wrote at once about the matter. Within four hours a stranger presented himself to see the amber beads, and to question her concerning the woman who had pawned the same. He

just this way. Miss Lyle said as how Rosa, to get rid of the necklace until the affair of the murder was blown over, might pawn it. I thought so too, so I sent a printed slip to all the pop-shops in London. You wrote that the beads were here, so it seems as Miss Lyle was right.'

'Evidently. By the way, who gets the money of Mrs Arryford?'

'A Mr Frederick Jevons; he's a nephew of Miss Lyle's.'

'A nephew of Miss Lyle's!' echoed Hagar, in surprise. 'And why did Mrs Arryford leave her money to him instead of to her relatives?'

'Well, it's just this way, miss,' said Horval, rising. 'She hadn't got no relatives; and as Mr Jevons was a good-looking young chap, always at the house to see his aunt, she took a fancy to him and left the money his way.'

'You are sure that Miss Lyle is no relation to Mrs Arryford?'

'Quite sure. She was only the old girl's companion.'

'Was Mrs Arryford weak in the head?'

'Not as I ever heard of,' said Mr Horval, with a stare, 'but you can find out, if you like, from Miss Lyle.'

'Miss Lyle? How am I to see her?'

'Why,' said the detective, clapping on his hat, 'when you come to see if Rosa is the same nigger as pawned the amber beads. Just leave someone to look after the shop, miss, and come with me right away.'

With true feminine curiosity, Hagar agreed at once to accompany the detective to Campden Hill. The shop was delivered into the charge of Bolker, a misshapen imp of sixteen, who for some months had been the plague of Hagar's life. He had a long body and long arms, short legs and a short temper, and also a most malignant eye, which indicated only too truly his spiteful nature. Having given a few instructions to this charming lad, Hagar departed with Horval in the omnibus, and arrived at Bedford Gardens early in the afternoon.

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The house was a quaint, pretty cottage, which stood in a delightful garden—once the solace of poor dead Mrs Arryford's soul—and was divided from the road by a tall fence of iron railings closed in with wooden planks painted a dark green. The room into which the detective and gipsy were shown was a prim and rather cosy apartment, which bore the impress of Miss Lyle's old-maidism in the disposition of the furniture. When they were seated here, and were waiting for Miss Lyle, who had been advised of their arrival, Hagar suddenly asked Horval a leading question.

'Is Rosa dumb?' she demanded.

'Bless you, no!' answered Horval. 'It's true as she don't talk much, but she can use her tongue in nigger fashion. Why do you ask?'

'She said she was dumb when she pawned the beads.'

'Oh, that was 'cause she was too 'cute to let her voice betray her,' replied Horval, smiling. He had humour enough to note Hagar's unconscious bull; but as she was likely to be useful to him in the conduct of the case, he did not wish to anger her by remarking on it.

When Miss Lyle made her appearance, Hagar, after the manner of women, took immediate note of her looks and manner. The old maid was tall and lean and yellow, with grey eyes, and a thin-lipped, hard-tempered mouth, turned down at the curves. Her iron-grey hair was drawn tightly off her narrow forehead and screwed into a hard-looking knob behind. She wore a black stuff gown, sombre and lustreless; collar and cuffs of white linen, and cloth slippers, in which she glided noiselessly. Altogether an unpromising, hard woman, acidulated and narrow-minded, who looked disapprovingly on the rich beauty of Hagar, and remarked her graces with a jaundiced eye and a vinegary look. The cough with which she ended her inspection shewed that she condemned the girl at first sight.

'Is this young person necessary to your conduct of the

case?" said Miss Lyle, addressing herself to Horval, and ignoring Hagar altogether.

'Why, yes, miss,' replied Horval, on whom the antagonistic attitude of the two women was not lost. 'She keeps the pawn-shop at which Rosa pawned the beads!'

Miss Lyle gave a start of virtuous horror, and her thin lips wreathed in a viperous smile 'The wretch did kill my poor friend, then,' she said in a soft and fluty voice. 'I knew it!'

'She pawned the amber beads, Miss Lyle, but . . .'

'Now, don't say the wretch didn't kill my martyred friend,' snapped Miss Lyle, going to the bell-rope, 'but we'll have her in, and perhaps this young person will recognise her as the viper who pawned the beads'

'It is to be hoped so,' said Hagar, very drily, not approving of being spoken at in the third person, 'but the negress kept her face turned away, and I might not . . .'

'It is your duty to recognize her,' exclaimed Miss Lyle, addressing herself to the girl for once 'I am convinced that Rosa is a dangerous criminal. Here she is—the black Jezebel!'

As the last word fell from her mouth the door opened, and Rosa entered the room, whereat Hagar uttered an exclamation of surprise. This negress was rather short, and more than a trifle stout. It is true that she wore a yellow dress trimmed with black jet beading; that silver ornaments were on her neck and wrists; also that she was without the wonderful hat. Still, Hagar was surprised, and explained her ejaculation forthwith.

'That is not the woman who pawned the beads!' she declared, rising.

'Not the woman?' echoed Miss Lyle, virulently 'She must be! This is Rosa!'

'Yis, yis! I Rosa,' said the negress, beginning to weep, 'but I no kill my poo' dear missy Dat one big lie'

'Are you sure, miss, that this is not the woman?' asked Horval, rather dismayed.

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Hagar stepped forward, and looked sharply at the sobbing negress up and down. Then she glanced at the woman's hands and shook her head.

'I am prepared to swear in a court of law that this is not the woman,' she said, quietly.

'Rubbish, rubbish!' cried Miss Lyle, flushing. 'Rosa coveted the necklace, as it was connected with some debased African superstition, and . . .'

'It one ole fetish!' interrupted Rosa, her eyes sparkling fire at the old maid, 'and ole missy she did wish to gib it me, but you no let her.'

'Certainly not!' said Miss Lyle, with dignity. 'The necklace was not fit for you to wear. And because I persuaded Mrs Arryford not to give it to you, you murdered her, you wretch! Down on your knees, woman, and confess!'

'I no 'fess!' exclaimed the terrified negress. 'I no kill my missy! I no gib dose amber beads for money. If dose beads mine, I keep dem; dey a mighty big fetish, for sure!'

'One moment,' said Horval, as Miss Lyle was about to speak again, 'let us conduct this inquiry calmly, and give the accused every chance. Miss,' he said, turning to Hagar, 'on what day, at what time, was it that the beads were pawned?'

Hagar calculated rapidly, and answered promptly: 'On the evening of the 23rd of August, between six and seven o'clock.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Miss Lyle, joyfully—'and on that very evening Rosa was out, and did not return till nine!'

'Me went to see Massa Jevons for you!' said Rosa vehemently, 'you send me.'

'I send you! Just listen to the creature's lies! Besides, Mr Jevons's rooms are in Duke Street, St James's, whereas it was at Lambeth you were.'

'I no go to dat gem'man's house. You send me to de train Waterloo!'

'Waterloo!' said Horval, looking sharply at Rosa. 'You were there?'

'Yis, massa; me dere at seven and eight.'

'In the neighbourhood of Lambeth,' murmured Horval. 'She might have gone to the pawn-shop after all.'

'Of course she did!' cried Miss Lyle, vindictively—'and pawned the amber beads of my poor dead friend!'

'She did nothing of the sort!' interposed Hagar, with spirit. 'Whosoever pawned the beads, it was not this woman. Besides, how do you know that Rosa killed Mrs Arryford?'

'She wanted the beads, young woman, and she killed my friend to obtain them.'

'No, no! dat one big lie!'

'I am sure it is!' said Hagar, her face aflame. 'I believe in your innocence, Rosa. Mr Horval,' she added, turning to the detective, 'you can't arrest this woman, as you have no grounds to do so.'

'Well, if she didn't pawn those beads . . .'

'She did not, I tell you.'

'She did!' cried Miss Lyle angrily. 'I believe you are an accomplice of the creature's!'

What reply Hagar would have made to this accusation it is impossible to say, for at this moment a young man walked into the room. He was good-looking in appearance, and smart in dress, but there was a haggard look about his face which betokened dissipation.

'This,' said Miss Lyle, introducing him, 'is my nephew, the heir to the property of my late dear friend. He is resolved, as such heir, to find out and punish the assassin of his benefactress. For my part, I believe Rosa to be guilty.'

'And I,' cried Hagar, with energy, 'believe her to be innocent!'

'Let us hope she is,' said Jevons, in a weary voice, as he removed his gloves. 'I am tired of the whole affair.'

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'You are bound to punish the guilty!' said Miss Lyle, in hard tones.

'But not the innocent,' retorted Hagar, rising.

'Young woman, you are insolent!'

Hagar looked Miss Lyle up and down in the coolest manner; then her eyes wandered to the well-dressed figure of Jevons, the heir. What she saw in him to startle her it is difficult to say, but after a moment's inspection she turned pale with suppressed emotion. Stepping forward, she was about to speak, when, checking herself suddenly, she beckoned to Horval, and advanced towards the door.

'My errand here is fulfilled,' she said, quietly. 'Mr Horval, perhaps you will come with me.'

'Yes, and you can go also, Rosa,' cried Miss Lyle, angered by the insulting gaze of the girl. 'I am mistress here in my nephew's house, and I refuse to let a murderess remain under its roof!'

'Be content,' said Hagar, pausing at the door. 'Rosa shall come with me, and when you see us again with Mr Horval, you will then learn who killed Mrs Arryford, and why.'

'Insolent hussy!' muttered Miss Lyle, and closed the door on Hagar, Horval and the black woman.

The trio walked away, and shortly afterwards picked up an omnibus, in which they returned to the Lambeth pawnshop. Hagar talked earnestly to Horval the whole way; and from the close attention which the detective paid to her it would seem that the conversation was of the deepest interest. Rosa, a dejected heap of misery, sat with downcast eyes, and at intervals wiped away the tears which ran down her black cheeks. The poor negress, under suspicion as a thief and a murderess, turned out of house and home, desolate and forsaken, was crushed to the earth under the burden of her woes. On her the fetish necklace of amber beads had brought a curse.

On arriving at the shop Hagar conducted Rosa into the

back parlour; and after a further conference she dismissed the detective.

‘You can stay with me for a week,’ she said to Rosa.

‘And den what you do?’

‘Oh,’ said Hagar, with an agreeable smile, ‘I shall take you with me to denounce the assassin of your late mistress.’

All that week Rosa stayed in the domestic portion of the pawn-shop, and made herself useful in cooking and cleaning. Hagar questioned her closely concerning the events which had taken place on the night of the murder in the house at Bedford Gardens, and elicited certain information which gave her great satisfaction. This she communicated to Horval when he one day paid her a hurried visit. When in possession of the facts, Horval looked at her with admiration, and on taking his leave he paid her a compliment.

‘You ought to be a man, with that head of yours,’ he said; ‘you’re too good to be a woman!’

‘And not bad enough to be a man,’ retorted Hagar, laughing. ‘Be off with you, Mr Horval, and let me know when you want me up West.’

In four more days Horval again made his appearance, this time in a state of the greatest excitement. He was closeted with Hagar for over an hour, and at its conclusion he departed in a great hurry. Shortly after noon Hagar resigned the shop into Bolker’s charge, put on hat and cloak, and ordered Rosa to come with her. What the reason of this unexpected departure might be she did not inform the negress immediately; but before they reached their destination Rosa knew all, and was much rejoiced thereat.

Hagar took Rosa as far as Duke Street, St James’s, and here, at the door of a certain house, they found the detective impatiently waiting for them.

‘Well, Mr Horval,’ said Hagar, coming to a stop, ‘is he indoors?’

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'Safe and sound!' replied Horval, tapping his breast-coat pocket—'and I have got you know what here. Shall we come up?'

'Not immediately. I wish to see him by myself first. You remain outside his door, and enter with Rosa when I call you.'

Mr Horval nodded, with a full comprehension of what was required of him, and the trio ascended the dark staircase. They paused at a door on the second landing. Then Hagar, motioning to her companions that they should withdraw themselves into the gloom, rapped lightly on the portal. Shortly afterwards it was opened by Mr Frederick Jevons, who looked inquiringly at Hagar. She turned her face towards the light which fell through the murky staircase window, whereat, recognizing her, he stepped back in dismay.

'The pawn-shop girl!' said he in astonishment. 'What do you want?'

'I wish to see you,' replied Hagar, composedly, 'but it is just as well that our conversation should be in private.'

'Why, you can have nothing to say to me but what the whole world might hear!'

'After I have mentioned the object of my visit you may think differently,' said Hagar, with some dryness. 'However, we'll talk here if you wish.'

'No, no; come in,' said Jevons, standing on one side. 'Since you insist upon privacy, you shall have it. This way.'

He shewed her into a large and rather badly-furnished room. Evidently Mr Fred Jevons had not been rich until he inherited the fortune of Mrs Arryford.

'I suppose you will be moving to the Bedford Gardens house soon?' said Hagar, sitting composedly in a large armchair.

'Is that what you came to speak to me about?' retorted Jevons, rudely.

'Not exactly. Perhaps, as you are impatient, we had better get to business.'

'Business! What business can I have to do with you?'

'Why,' said Hagar, quietly, and looking directly at him, 'the business of those amber beads which you—pawned.'

'I,' stammered Jevons, drawing back with a pale face.

'Also,' added Hagar, solemnly, 'the business which concerns the commission of a crime.'

'A—a—a crime!' gasped the wretched creature.

'Yes—the most terrible of all crimes—murder!'

'What—what—what do you—you mean?'

Hagar rose from her chair, and, drawn to her full height, stretched out an accusing arm towards the young man. 'What I mean you know well enough!' she said, sternly. 'I mean that you murdered Mrs Arryford!'

'It's a lie!' cried Jevons, sinking into a chair, for his legs refused to support him longer.

'It is not a lie—it is the truth! I have evidence!'

'Evidence!' He started up with dry and trembling lips.

'Yes. Through her influence over Mrs Arryford, your aunt induced her to make you her heir. You are fond of money; you are in debt, and you could not wait until the old lady died in the course of nature. On the night of the murder you were in the house.'

'No, no! I swear . . .'

'You need not; you were seen leaving the house. To throw suspicion on Rosa you disguised yourself as a negress, and came to pawn the amber bead necklace at my shop. I recognized that the supposed black woman was minus the little finger of the right hand. You, Mr Jevons, are mutilated in the same way. Again, I paid you with a five-pound note. Of that note I took the number. It has been traced by the number, and you are the man who paid it away. I saw . . .'

Jevons jumped up, still white and shaking. 'It's a lie!

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a lie!' he said, hoarsely. 'I did not kill Mrs Arryford; I did not pawn the beads. I did . . .'

'You did both those things!' said Hagar, brushing past him. 'I have two witnesses who can prove what I say is true. Rosa! Mr Horval!'

She flung the outside door wide open, while Jevons again sank into the arm-chair, with an expression of horror on his white face. 'Rosa! Horval!' he muttered. 'I am lost!'

Rosa and the detective entered quickly in response to Hagar's call, and with her looked down on the shrinking figure of the accused man.

'These are my witnesses,' said Hagar, slowly. 'Rosa!'

'I saw dat man in de house when my missy died,' said the negress. 'I hear noise in de night; I come down, and I see Massa Jevons run away from de room of my missy, and Missus Lyle let him out by de side door. He kill my poo' missy—yes, I tink dat.'

'You hear,' said Hagar to the terrified man. 'Now, Mr Horval.'

'I traced the five-pound note you gave him by its number,' said the detective. 'Yes, he paid it away at his club, I can bring a waiter to prove it'

'You hear,' said Hagar again, 'and I know by the evidence of your lost finger that you are the man, disguised as a negress, who pawned the necklace which was stolen from the person of Mrs Arryford, after you murdered her. The dead woman, as Rosa tells us, wore that necklace night and day Only with her death could it have been removed. You murdered her, you stole the necklace of amber beads.'

Jevons leaped up: 'No, no, no!' he cried, loudly, striking his hands together in despair. 'I am innocent!'

'That,' said Horval, slipping the handcuffs on his wrists, 'you shall prove before a judge and jury.'

When Jevons, still protesting his innocence, was removed to prison, Hagar and the negress returned to Carby's

Crescent. It can easily be guessed how she had traced the crime home to Jevons. She had noticed that the negress who pawned the beads had no little finger. On being brought face to face with Rosa, she had seen that the woman had not lost the finger; and when Jevons had removed his gloves she had seen in his right hand the evidence that he was one with the mysterious black woman of the pawn-shop. Still, she was not certain; and it was only when Rosa had deposed to the presence of the man at midnight in the Bedford Gardens house, and when Horval had traced the five-pound note of which she had taken the number, that she was certain that Jevons was the murderer. Hence the accusation; hence the arrest. But now the fact of his guilt was clearly established. To obtain the wealth of Mrs Arryford the wretched man had committed a crime, to hide that crime and throw the blame on Rosa he had pawned the amber beads; and now the amber beads were about to hang him. In the moment of his triumph, when preparing to enjoy the fruits of his crime, Nemesis had struck him down.

The news of the arrest, the story of the amber beads, was in all the papers next day; and next day, also, Miss Lyle came to see Hagar. Pale and stern, she swept into the shop, and looked at Hagar with a bitter smile.

‘Girl!’ she said, harshly, ‘you have been our evil genius!’

‘I have been the means of denouncing your accomplice, you mean,’ returned Hagar, composedly.

‘My accomplice—no, my son!’

‘Your son!’ Hagar recoiled, with a startled expression ‘Your son, Miss Lyle?’

‘Not Miss, but Mrs Lyle,’ returned the gaunt, pale woman; ‘and Frederick Jevons is my son by my first husband. You think he is guilty; you are wrong, for he is innocent. You believe that you will hang him; but I tell you, girl, he will go free Read this paper,’ she said, thrusting an envelope into the hand of Hagar, ‘and you will see how you

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have been mistaken. I shall never see you again in this life; but I leave my curse on you!’

Before Hagar could collect her wits, Miss—or rather Mrs—Lyle, as she called herself, went hurriedly out of the shop. Her manner was so wild, her words so ominous of evil, that Hagar had it on her mind to follow her, and, if possible, prevent the consequences of her despair. She hurried to the door, but Mrs Lyle had disappeared, and as there was no one to mind the shop, Hagar could not go after her. Luckily, at this moment Horval turned the corner, and at once the girl beckoned to him.

‘Miss Lyle—did you see her?’

‘Yes,’ said Horval, with a nod ‘she’s on her way across Westminster Bridge.’

‘Oh, follow her—follow her quickly!’ cried Hagar, wildly, ‘she is not herself; she is bent on some rash deed!’

Horval paused a moment in bewilderment; then, grasping the situation, he turned, without a word, and raced down the street in the trail of Miss Lyle. Hagar watched his hurrying figure until it turned the corner; then she retreated to the back parlour, and hurriedly opened the envelope. On the sheet of paper she found within the following confession was written:

‘I am not a spinster, but a widow,’ began the document abruptly—‘a twice-married woman. By my first husband I had Frederick Jevons, who passes as my nephew, and whom I love better than my own soul. When my second husband, Mr Lyle, died, I cast about for some means of employment, as I was poor. Mrs Arryford advertised for an unmarried woman as a companion; she absolutely refused to have any companion but a spinster. To get the situation, which was a good one, as Mrs Arryford was rich, I called myself Miss Lyle, and obtained the place. Mrs Arryford had no relatives and much money, so I schemed to

obtain her wealth for my son, whom I introduced as my nephew. Rosa, the black maid, had a great deal of influence over her weak-minded mistress, and in some way—I don't know how—she fathomed my purpose. It was a battle between us, as Rosa was determined that I should not get the money of Mrs Arryford for my son. Finally I triumphed, and Frederick was left sole heir of all the old lady's wealth. Then Rosa learnt, by eavesdropping, the true relationship between myself and Frederick. She told her mistress, and with Mrs Arryford I had a stormy scene, in which she declared her intention of revoking her will and turning me and my son out on the world as paupers. I begged, I implored, I threatened; but Mrs Arryford, backed up by that wicked Rosa, was firm. I sent for my son to try and soften the old lady, but he was not in town, and did not come to see me till late at night. When he arrived I told him that I had killed Mrs Arryford. I did so to prevent her altering her will, and out of love for my dear son, lest he should lose the money. Frederick was horrified, and rushed from the house. I believe Rosa saw me let him out by the side door. I was determined to throw the blame on Rosa, as I hated her so. Knowing that she coveted the necklace of amber beads, I stole it from the neck of the dead woman and gave it to my son next day. I suggested that he should dress up as Rosa, and pawn the necklace, so that she might be suspected. To save me, he did so. I obtained a dress that Rosa was fond of wearing—yellow silk trimmed with black beads, also the jewellery of the creature. Frederick blackened his face, and pawned the beads in a pawn-shop at Lambeth. I sent Rosa on a pretended errand to Waterloo Station, at the time Frederick was pawning the beads, so as to get evidence against her that she was in the neighbourhood. Then I suggested to Horval, the

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detective, that the beads might have been pawned. He found the shop, and I thought my plot had succeeded; that Rosa would be condemned and hanged. Unfortunately, the woman who kept the pawn-shop was clever, and traced Frederick by means of his mutilated righthand I hate her! Frederick is now in prison on a charge of murder, which he did not commit. I am guilty. I killed Mrs Arryford. Frederick knows nothing. He helped me to save myself by trying to throw the blame on Rosa. All useless. I am guilty, and I am determined that he shall not suffer for my sin. Officers of the law, I command you to release my son and arrest me. I am the murderess of Mrs Arryford. I swear it.

JULIA LYLE.

‘Witnesses:

‘Amelia Tyke (housemaid)

‘Mark Drew (butler).’

Hagar let the document fall from her hands with a sensation of pity for the wretched woman.

‘How she must love her son,’ thought the girl, ‘to have murdered a kind and good woman for his sake! It is terrible! Well, I suppose he will now be released and will enter into possession of the wealth his mother schemed to obtain for him. But he must do justice to Rosa for all the trouble he has caused her. He must give her an annuity, and also the necklace of amber beads, which has been the cause of tracing the crime home to its door. As for Mrs Lyle . . .’

At this moment, white and breathless, Horval rushed into the parlour. Hagar sprang to her feet, and looked anxiously at him, expectant of bad news. She was right

‘My girl,’ cried Horval, hoarsely, ‘Miss Lyle is dead!’

‘Dead? Ah!’ said Hagar to herself. ‘I thought as much.’

‘She threw herself over Westminster Bridge, and has just been picked out of the water—dead!’

‘Dead!’ said Hagar again. ‘Dead!’

‘As a door-nail!’ replied the detective in a perplexed tone. ‘But why—why did she commit suicide?’

Hagar sighed, and in silence handed to the detective the confession of the dead woman.

VII

How He Cut His Stick

M. McD. Bodkin Q.C.

He breathed freely at last as he lifted the small black Gladstone bag of stout calfskin, and set it carefully on the seat of the empty railway carriage close beside him.

He lifted the bag with a manifest effort. Yet he was a big powerfully built young fellow; handsome too in a way; with straw-coloured hair and moustache and a round face, placid, honest-looking but not too clever. His light blue eyes had an anxious, worried look. No wonder, poor chap! he was weighted with a heavy responsibility. That unobtrusive black bag held £5,000 in gold and notes which he—a junior clerk in the famous banking house of Gower and Grant—was taking from the head office in London to a branch two hundred miles down the line.

The older and more experienced clerk whose ordinary duty it was to convey the gold had been taken strangely and suddenly ill at the last moment.

‘There’s Jim Pollock,’ said the bank manager, looking round for a substitute, ‘he’ll do. He is big enough to knock the head off anyone that interferes with him.’

So Jim Pollock had the heavy responsibility thrust upon him. The big fellow who would tackle any man in England in a football rush without a thought of fear was as nervous

as a two-year-old child. All the way down to this point his watchful eyes and strong right hand had never left the bag for a moment. But here at the Eddiscombe Junction he had got locked in alone to a single first-class carriage, and there was a clear run of forty-seven miles to the next stoppage.

So with a sigh and shrug of relief, he threw away his anxiety, lay back on the soft seat, lit a pipe, drew a sporting paper from his pocket, and was speedily absorbed in the account of the Rugby International Championship match, for Jim himself was not without hopes of his 'cap' in the near future.

The train rattled out of the station and settled down to its smooth easy stride—a good fifty miles an hour through the open country.

Still absorbed in his paper he did not notice the gleam of two stealthy keen eyes that watched him from the dark shadow under the opposite seat. He did not see that long lithe wiry figure uncoil and creep out, silently as a snake, across the floor of the carriage.

He saw nothing, and felt nothing till he felt two murderous hands clutching at his throat and a knee crushing his chest in.

Jim was strong, but before his sleeping strength had time to waken, he was down on his back on the carriage floor with a handkerchief soaked in chloroform jammed close to his mouth and nostrils.

He struggled desperately for a moment or so, half rose and almost flung off his clinging assailant. But even as he struggled the dreamy drug stole strength and sense away; he fell back heavily and lay like a log on the carriage floor.

The faithful fellow's last thought as his senses left him was 'The gold is gone.' It was his first thought as he awoke with dizzy pain and racked brain from the deathlike swoon. The train was still at full speed, the carriage doors

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‘And you?’

‘I will be frank with you, Miss Myrl. I have my doubts. The case *seems* conclusive. It is impossible that anybody could have got out of the train at full speed. But I have seen the lad, and I have my doubts.’

‘Can I see him?’

‘I would be very glad if you did.’

After five minutes’ conversation with Jim Pollock, Dora drew Sir Gregory aside.

‘I think I see my way,’ she said, ‘I will undertake the case on one condition.’

‘Any fee that . . .’

‘It’s not the fee. I never talk of the fee till the case is over. I will undertake the case if you give me Mr Pollock to help me. Your instinct was right, Sir Gregory: the boy is innocent.’

There was much grumbling amongst the police when a *nolle prosequi* was entered on behalf of the bank, and James Pollock was discharged from custody, and it was plainly hinted the Crown would interpose.

Meanwhile Pollock was off by a morning train with Miss Dora Myrl, from London to Eddiscombe. He was brimming over with gratitude and devotion. Of course they talked of the robbery on the way down.

‘The bag was very heavy, Mr Pollock?’ Dora asked.

‘I’d sooner carry it one mile than ten, Miss Myrl.’

‘Yet you are pretty strong, I should think.’

She touched his protruding biceps professionally with her finger tips, and he coloured to the roots of his hair.

‘Would you know the man that robbed you if you saw him again?’ Dora asked.

‘Not from Adam. He had his hands on my throat, the chloroform crammed into my mouth before I knew where I was. It was about nine or ten miles outside Eddiscombe. You believe there *was* a man—don’t you, Miss Myrl? You

are about the only person that does. I don't blame them, for how did the chap get out of the train going at the rate of sixty miles an hour—that's what fetches me, 'pon my word,' he concluded incoherently; 'if I was any other chap I'd believe myself guilty on the evidence. Can you tell me how the trick was done, Miss Myrl?'

'That's my secret for the present, Mr Pollock, but I may tell you this much, when we get to the pretty little town of Eddiscombe I will look out for a stranger with a crooked stick instead of a black bag.'

There were three hotels in Eddiscombe, but Mr Mark Brown and his sister were hard to please. They tried the three in succession, keeping their eyes about them for a stranger with a crooked stick, and spending their leisure time in exploring the town and country on a pair of capital bicycles, which they hired by the week.

As Miss Brown (alias Dora Myrl) was going down the stairs of the third hotel one sunshiny afternoon a week after their arrival, she met midway, face to face, a tall middle-aged man limping a little, a very little, and leaning on a stout oak stick, with a dark shiny varnish, and a crooked handle. She passed him without a second glance. But that evening she gossiped with the chambermaid, and learned that the stranger was a commercial traveller—Mr McCrowder—who had been staying some weeks at the hotel, with an occasional run up to London in the train, and run round the country on his bicycle, 'a nice, easily-pleased, pleasant-spoken gentleman,' the chambermaid added on her own account.

Next day Dora Myrl met the stranger again in the same place on the stairs. Was it her awkwardness or his?—As she moved aside to let him pass, her little foot caught in the stick, jerked it from his hand, and sent it clattering down the stairs into the hall.

She ran swiftly down the stairs in pursuit, and carried it back with a pretty apology to the owner. But not before

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she had seen on the inside of the crook a deep notch, cutting through the varnish into the wood.

At dinner that day their table adjoined Mr McCrowder's. Half way through the meal she asked Jim to tell her what the hour was, as her watch had stopped. It was a curious request, for she sat facing the clock, and he had to turn round to see it. But Jim turned obediently, and came face to face with Mr McCrowder, who started and stared at the sight of him as though he had seen a ghost. Jim stared back stolidly without a trace of recognition in his face, and Mr McCrowder, after a moment, resumed his dinner. Then Dora set, or seemed to set and wind, her watch, and so the curious little incident closed.

That evening Dora played a musical little jingle on the piano in their private sitting-room, touching the notes abstractedly and apparently deep in thought. Suddenly she closed the piano with a bang.

'Mr Pollock?'

'Well, Miss Myrl,' said Jim, who had been watching her with the patient, honest, stupid admiration of a big Newfoundland dog.

'We will take a ride together on our bicycles to-morrow. I cannot say what hour, but have them ready when I call for them.'

'Yes, Miss Myrl.'

'And bring a ball of stout twine in your pocket.'

'Yes, Miss Myrl.'

'By the way, have you a revolver?'

'Never had such a thing in my life.'

'Could you use it if you got it?'

'I hardly know the butt from the muzzle, but'—modestly—
—'I can fight a little bit with my fists if that's any use.'

'Not the least in this case. An ounce of lead can stop a fourteen-stone champion. Besides one six-shooter is enough and I'm not too bad a shot.'

'You don't mean to say, Miss Myrl, that you . . .'

‘I don’t mean to say one word more at present, Mr Pollock, only have the bicycles ready when I want them and the twine.’

Next morning, after an exceptionally early breakfast, Dora took her place with a book in her hand coiled up on a sofa in a bow-window of the empty drawing-room that looked out on the street. She kept one eye on her book and the other on the window from which the steps of the hotel were visible.

About half-past nine o’clock she saw Mr McCrowder go down the steps, not limping at all, but carrying his bicycle with a big canvas bicycle-bag strapped to the handle bar.

In a moment she was down in the hall where the bicycles stood ready; in another she and Pollock were in the saddle sailing swiftly and smoothly along the street just as the tall figure of Mr McCrowder was vanishing round a distant corner.

‘We have got to keep him in sight,’ Dora whispered to her companion as they sped along, ‘or rather I have got to keep him and you to keep me in sight. Now let me go to the front; hold as far back as you can without losing me, and the moment I wave a white handkerchief—scorch!’

Pollock nodded and fell back, and in this order—each about half a mile apart—the three riders swept out of the town into the open country.

The man in front was doing a strong steady twelve miles an hour, but the roads were good and Dora kept her distance without an effort, while Pollock held himself back. For a full hour this game of follow-my-leader was played without a change. Mr McCrowder had left the town at the opposite direction to the railway, but now he began to wheel round towards the line. Once he glanced behind and saw only a single girl cycling in the distance on the deserted road. The next time he saw no one, for Dora rode close to the inner curve.

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They were now a mile or so from the place where the telegraph wires had been broken down, and Dora, who knew the lie of the land, felt sure their little bicycle trip was drawing to a close.

The road climbed a long easy winding slope thickly wooded on either side. The man in front put on a spurt; Dora answered it with another, and Pollock behind sprinted fiercely, lessening his distance from Dora. The leader crossed the top bend of the slope, turned a sharp curve, and went swiftly down a smooth decline, shaded by the interlacing branches of great trees.

Half a mile down at the bottom of the slope, he leaped suddenly from his bicycle with one quick glance back the way he had come. There was no one in view, for Dora held back at the turn. He ran his bicycle close into the wall on the left hand side where a deep trench hid it from the casual passers by; unstrapped the bag from the handle bar, and clambered over the wall with an agility that was surprising in one of his (apparent) age.

Dora was just round the corner in time to see him leap from the top of the wall into the thick wood. At once she drew out and waved her white handkerchief, then settled herself in the saddle and made her bicycle fly through the rush of a sudden wind, down the slope.

Pollock saw the signal; bent down over his handle bar and pedalled uphill like the piston rods of a steam engine.

The man's bicycle by the roadside was a finger post for Dora. She, in her turn, over-perched the wall as lightly as a bird. Gathering her tailor-made skirt tightly around her, she peered and listened intently. She could see nothing, but a little way in front a slight rustling of the branches caught her quick ears. Moving in the underwood, stealthily and silently as a rabbit, she caught a glimpse through the leaves of a dark grey tweed suit fifteen or twenty yards off. A few steps more and she had a clear view. The man was on his knees; he had drawn a black leather bag from a thick tangle

of ferns at the foot of a great old beech tree, and was busy cramming a number of small canvas sacks into his bicycle bag.

Dora moved cautiously forward till she stood in a little opening, clear of the undergrowth, free to use her right arm.

‘Good morning, Mr McCrowder!’ she cried sharply.

The man started, and turned and saw a girl half a dozen yards off standing clear in the sunlight, with a mocking smile on her face.

His lips growled out a curse; his right hand left the bags and stole to his side pocket.

‘Stop that!’ The command came clear and sharp. ‘Throw up your hands!’

He looked again. The sunlight glinted on the barrel of a revolver, pointed straight at his head, with a steady hand.

‘Up with your hands, or I fire!’ and his hands went up over his head. The next instant Jim Pollock came crashing through the underwood, like an elephant through the jungle.

He stopped short with a cry of amazement.

‘Steady!’ came Dora’s quiet voice; ‘don’t get in my line of fire. Round there to the left—that’s the way. Take away his revolver. It is in his right-hand coat pocket. Now tie his hands!’

Jim Pollock did his work stolidly as directed. But while he wound the strong cord round the wrists and arms of Mr McCrowder, he remembered the railway carriage and the strangling grip at his throat, and the chloroform, and the disgrace that followed, and if he strained the knots extra tight it’s hard to blame him.

‘Now,’ said Dora, ‘finish his packing,’ and Jim crammed the remainder of the canvas sacks into the big bicycle bag.

‘You don’t mind the weight?’

He gave a delighted grin for answer, as he swung both bags in his hands.

‘Get up!’ said Dora to the thief, and he stumbled to his

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feet sulkily. 'Walk in front. I mean to take you back to Eddiscombe with me.'

When they got on the road-side Pollock strapped the bicycle bag to his own handle-bar.

'May I trouble you, Mr Pollock, to unscrew one of the pedals of this gentleman's bicycle?' said Dora.

It was done in a twinkling. 'Now give him a lift up,' she said to Jim, 'he is going to ride back with one pedal.'

The abject thief held up his bound wrists imploringly.

'Oh, that's all right. I noticed you held the middle of your handle-bar from choice coming out. You'll do it from necessity going back. We'll look after you. Don't whine; you've played a bold game and lost the odd trick, and you've got to pay up, that's all.'

There was a wild sensation in Eddiscombe when, in broad noon, the bank thief was brought in riding on a one-pedalled machine to the police barrack and handed into custody. Dora rode on through the cheering crowd to the hotel

A wire brought Sir Gregory Grant down by the afternoon train, and the three dined together that night at his cost; the best dinner and wine the hotel could supply. Sir Gregory was brimming over with delight, like the bubbling champagne in his wine glass.

'Your health, Mr Pollock,' said the banker to the junior clerk 'We will make up in the bank to you for the annoyance you have had. You shall fix your own fee, Miss Myrl—or, rather, I'll fix it for you if you allow me. Shall we say half the salvage? But I'm dying with curiosity to know how you managed to find the money and thief.'

'It was easy enough when you come to think of it, Sir Gregory The man would have been a fool to tramp across the country with a black bag full of gold while the "Hue and Cry" was hot on him His game was to hide it and lie low, and he did so. The sight of Mr Pollock at the hotel hurried him—
1 it would; that's the whole story.'

'Oh, that's not all. How did you find the man? How did the man get out of the train going at the rate of sixty miles an hour? But I suppose I'd best ask that question of Mr Pollock, who was there?'

'Don't ask me any questions, sir,' said Jim, with a look of profound admiration in Dora's direction. 'She played the game off her own bat. All I know is that the chap cut his stick after he had done for me. I cannot in the least tell how.'

'Will you have pity on my curiosity, Miss Myrl.'

'With pleasure, Sir Gregory. You must have noticed, as I did, that where the telegraph was broken down the line was embanked and the wires ran quite close to the railway carriage. It is easy for an active man to slip a crooked stick like this' (she held up Mr McCrowder's stick as she spoke) 'over the two or three of the wires and so swing himself into the air clear of the train. The acquired motion would carry him along the wires to the post and give him a chance of breaking down the insulators.'

'By Jove! you're right, Miss Myrl. It's quite simple when one comes to think of it. But, still, I don't understand how ...'

'The friction of the wire,' Dora went on in the even tone of a lecturer, 'with a man's weight on it, would bite deep into the wood of the stick, like that!' Again she held out the crook of a dark thick oak stick for Sir Gregory to examine, and he peered at it through his gold spectacles.

'The moment I saw that notch,' Dora added quietly, 'I knew how Mr McCrowder had "*Cut his stick*".'

VIII

A Race with the Sun

L. T. Meade
and Clifford Halifax

It was in the spring of 1895 that the following apparently unimportant occurrence took place. I returned home somewhat late one evening, and was met by my servant, Silva, with the words:

‘A lady, sir—a nun, I think, from her dress—is waiting for you in your study.’

‘What can she want with me?’ I asked. I felt annoyed, as I was anxious to get to work on some important experiments.

‘She is very anxious to have an interview with you, sir; she called almost immediately after you had gone out, and said if I would allow her she would wait to speak to you, as her mission was of some importance. I showed her into the study, and after a quarter of an hour she rang the bell, and desired me to tell you that she would not wait now, but would call again later. She left the house, but came back about ten minutes ago. I did not like to refuse her, and . . .’

‘Quite right, Silva; I will see to the matter,’ I answered.

I went straight to the study, where a bright, young-looking woman, in the full costume of a nun of the Church

of Rome, started up and came forward to meet me. She made a brief apology for intruding upon me, and almost before I could reply to her, plunged into the object of her visit. It so happened that she knew a young man in whom I was interested, having come across him when in hospital—she confirmed my views with regard to him—told me a subscription was being got up for his benefit, and asked if I would contribute towards it. I gave her two sovereigns—she expressed much gratitude, and speedily left the house.

At this time I was lecturing in several quarters, and did not give another thought to such an apparently uninteresting event. In the autumn of the same year, however, I was destined to recall it with vivid and startling distinctness.

During this special autumn I was, as I fondly hoped, approaching the *magnum opus* of my life—I was in a fair way to the discovery of a new explosive which would put gunpowder, dynamite, and all other explosives completely in the shade. It was to be smokeless, devoid of smell, and also of such a nature that it would be impossible for it to ignite except when placed in certain combinations. Its propelling power would be greater than anything in existence; in short, if it turned out what I dreamed, it would be a most important factor in case of war, and of immense use to England as a nation. Giddy hopes often throbbed in my head as I worked over it.

My experiments were progressing favourably, but I still wanted one link. Try as I would I could not obtain it. No combinations that I attempted would produce the desired result, and in much vexation of spirit I was wondering if, after all, the secret of my life would never reveal itself, when on a certain afternoon Silva opened the door of my laboratory and announced two visitors. This was an unusual thing for him to do, and I started up in surprise and some involuntary annoyance. A tall man had entered the room—he was dark, with the swarthy complexion of a

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gipsy; his eyes were small, closely-set, and piercing; he had a long beard and a quantity of thick hair falling in profusion round his neck. Immediately following him was a little man, in every sense of the word his antitype. He was thin and small, clean-shaven, and with a bald head. The two men were total strangers to me, and I stood still for a moment unable to account for this intrusion. The elder of the two came forward with outstretched hands.

'Pardon me,' he said, 'I know I am intruding. My name is Paul Lewin—this is my friend, Carl Kruse. We have had the pleasure of listening to your lecture at the Royal Society, and have taken these unceremonious means of forcing ourselves upon you, for you are the only man in England who can do what we want.'

'Pray sit down,' I said to them both. I hastily cleared two chairs, and my uninvited guests seated themselves. Lewin's face seemed fairly to twitch with eagerness, but Kruse, on the contrary, was very quiet and calm. He was as immovable in expression as his companion was the reverse. The elder man's deep-set eyes flashed, he looked me all over from head to foot.

'You are the only person who can help us,' he repeated, breathing quickly as he spoke.

'Pray explain yourself,' I said to him.

'I will do so, and in a few words. Mr Kruse and I heard you lecture in the early part of last summer. From hints you let drop it became abundantly clear to us both that you were in the pursuit of a discovery which has occupied the best part of both our lives. We are in a difficulty which we believe that you can explain away. We had hoped not to ask you for any assistance, but time is precious—any moment you may perfect your most interesting experiments. In that case the patent and the honour would be yours, and we should be out of it. Now, we don't want to be out of it, and we have come here to ask you frankly if you will co-operate with us.'

I felt a warm blood rushing into my face.

‘I don’t understand you,’ I said; ‘to what discovery do you allude?’

‘To that of the great new explosive,’ said Kruse.

I sprang to my feet in ill-suppressed excitement.

‘You must be making a mistake,’ I said. ‘I have not breathed a word of the matter over which I am engaged to a living soul.’

‘You dropped hints at your lecture, which made it plain to us that you and we were on the same track,’ said Kruse. ‘But here, I can prove the matter.’ He took a note-book hurriedly out of his pocket and began to read from it.

I listened to him in dismay and astonishment. There was not the least doubt that these men were working on my own lines—nay, more, that their intelligence was equal to my own, and it was highly probable that they would be first in the field.

‘The fact is this,’ said Lewin. ‘My friend and I have been really working with you step by step. While you have been perfecting your great explosive in your London laboratory, we have been conducting matters on a larger and freer scale in our more extensive laboratories off the Cornish coast. The solitude of our place, too, enables us to test our explosive in the open air. Now, we know exactly the point to which you have come, and your present difficulty is’—he dropped his voice to a semi-whisper—‘you are trying to combine certain gases to produce a certain result. Now we have discovered what you want, but our explosive is still far from perfect, owing to the instability of nitrogen chloride’—he dropped his voice again.

‘You can help us,’ he said abruptly ‘I see by your face that you have certain information which will be valuable to us. Now we, on our side, have information which will be of immense benefit to you. Will you join us in the matter? You have but to name your own price’

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I could not help staring at Lewin in astonishment—he started impatiently from his seat.

‘This is the state of the case, sir,’ he continued. ‘Our lives have been spent over this matter—it is a great work—a magnificent discovery, it is nearly complete. When absolutely completed we intend to offer it to the German Government for something like a million sterling—but there is a probability that you may be first in the field. If you patent your discovery before ours, we are done men. Will you be content to work with us, or . . .’ He stopped, his face was crimson, his eyes seemed to start from his head.

‘My friend is right,’ said Kruse, ‘but he is far too excitable; I have told him so over and over. We know of your discovery, Mr Gilchrist; we believe that you can help us, and we know that we can help you. We are working on the same lines. The discovery of this new explosive means money, a very large fortune, and fame. Now, we don’t mean to resign our own share in this without a struggle, but we are satisfied to go hand in glove with you. Will you visit us in Cornwall and help us with our experiment? We will impart to you gladly what we know, on condition that you in your turn give us information. You thus see that between us the discovery is complete; without our united efforts it may be a very long time before it is ready for use. Let us go shares in the matter.’

‘I am not working at this thing for money,’ I said. ‘I am an unmarried man, and have as much money as I need. When my discovery is complete I shall offer it to the English Government—they can do what they please with it—my reward will be the gain which it will give to my country. This is a time of peace, but on all hands men are armed to the teeth. The discovery of this explosive, if it means all that I hope it may mean, will be a most important factor in case of war.’

Kruse laughed somewhat nervously.

‘We are not so quixotic as you are,’ he said; ‘I have a

wife, and my friend Lewin has large claims upon him which made it essential that he should make money where he can. Now, will you come to terms or not? The fact is this, our knowledge is indispensable to you, your knowledge is indispensable to us—shall we go shares or not?’

I thought for a little. I had begun by being much annoyed with my strange visitors, but now, in spite of myself, I was interested. They not only knew what they were talking about, but they had something to sell, which I was only too willing to buy.

‘Can I look at your notes for a moment?’ I said to Kruse.

He immediately handed me his note-book. I glanced over what he had written down—his statements were clear and to the point. There was no doubt that he and his companion were working on identical lines with myself.

‘I cannot give you an answer immediately,’ I said. ‘Your visit has astonished me; the knowledge that you and I are working at a similar discovery has amazed me still more. Will you call upon me again tomorrow? I may then be in a position to speak to you.’

They rose at once, Lewin with ill-suppressed irritation, but Kruse quietly.

The moment I was alone I gave myself up to anxious thought. It was impossible to pursue any further investigations that day, and leaving the laboratory, I spent the rest of the evening in my study. At night I slept little, and on the following morning had resolved to make terms with the Cornish men. They both arrived at ten o’clock, accompanied now by a pretty young woman, whom Kruse introduced as his wife. The moment I saw her face I was puzzled by an intangible likeness to somebody else—she was fair-haired, and, I had little doubt, had German blood in her veins—her eyes were large and blue, and particularly innocent in expression—her mouth was softly curved; she had pretty teeth and a bright smile—she was like thousands of other women, and yet there was a difference. I felt certain

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that she was not a stranger to me, but where and under what possible circumstances I had met her before was a mystery which I could not fathom. She apologized in a pretty way for forcing herself into my presence, but told me she was really as much interested in the discovery as her husband and friend, and as the matter was of the utmost importance, had insisted on coming with them to visit me today.

Having asked my guests to be seated, I immediately proceeded to the subject of their visit.

'I have thought very carefully over this matter,' I said, 'and perceive that it may be the best in the end for us to come to a mutual arrangement, but I can only do so on the distinct understanding that if this explosive is completed it is not to be offered to a foreign nation, except in the event of the English Government refusing it. That is extremely unlikely, as, if it is perfected on the lines which I have sketched out in my mind, it will be too valuable for us as a nation to lose. I am willing, gentlemen,' I continued, 'to help you with my knowledge, provided you allow a proper legal document to be drawn up, in which each of us pledges the other that we will take no steps with regard to the use of the explosive or the surrendering our rights in it, but with the concurrence of all three. My lawyer can easily prepare such a document, and we will all sign it. On those terms and those alone I am willing to go with you.'

Lewin looked by no means satisfied, but Kruse and his wife eagerly agreed to everything that I suggested.

'It is perfectly fair,' said Mrs Kruse, speaking in a bright, crisp voice, 'we give you something, you give us something. When the explosive is complete we go shares in the matter. We are willing to sign the document you speak of. Is it not so, Carl?'

'Certainly,' said her husband. 'Mr Gilchrist's terms are quite reasonable.'

Lewin still remained silent.

'I have nothing else to suggest,' I said, looking at him.

'Oh, I am in your hands,' he said then. 'The fact is, the thing that worries me is having to offer this to England. I am not a patriot in any sense of the word, and I believe Germany would give us more for it.'

'My terms are absolute,' I repeated. 'I am rather nearer to perfect discovery than you are, and the matter must drop, and we must both take our chances of being first in the field, if you do not agree to what I suggest.'

'I am in your hands,' repeated the man. 'When the legal document is drawn up I am willing to sign it.'

'And now,' said Mrs Kruse, coming forward and pushing back the fluffy hair from her forehead, 'you will immediately arrange to come to us in Cornwall, will you not Mr Gilchrist?'

'Certainly,' I replied, 'and the sooner the better, for if this thing is to be completed, we have really no time to lose. I can go to Cornwall the day after tomorrow, and bring my lawyer's document with me.'

'That will do capitally,' said Mrs Kruse. 'We ourselves go home tonight. We are greatly obliged to you. This is our address.' She took out her card-case as she spoke, extracted a card, and hastily scribbled some directions on the back.

'Our place is called Castle Lewin,' she said. 'It is situated on the coast not far from Chrome Ash—the country around is very wild, but there is a magnificent view and some splendid cliffs. Your nearest station is Chrome Ash. Our carriage shall meet you there and bring you straight to Castle Lewin.'

'You had best take an early train,' said Lewin, 'that is, if you want to arrive in time for dinner. A good train leaves Paddington at 5.50 in the morning. I am sorry we are asking you to undertake so long a journey.'

'Pray do not mention it,' I answered 'I am quite accustomed to going about the country, and think nothing of a few hours on the railway.'

'We will expect you the day after tomorrow,' said Mrs

Kruse. 'We are greatly obliged to you. I am quite sure you will never repent of the kindness you are about to show us.' She held out her hand frankly, her blue eyes looked full into mine. Again I was puzzled by an intangible likeness. Where, when, how had I met the gaze of those eyes before? My memory would not supply the necessary link. I took the hand she offered, and a few moments later my guests had left me alone.

I went out at once to consult my lawyer, and to tell him of the curious occurrence which had taken place. He promised to draw up the necessary document, and begged of me to be careful how far I gave myself away.

'There is no doubt that the men are enthusiastic scientists,' I said. 'It is plainly a case of give-and-take, and I believe I cannot do better than go shares with them in the matter.'

Mr Scrivener promised that I should have the terms of agreement in my possession that evening, and I returned home.

The next day I made further preparations for my Cornish visit, and on the following morning, at an early hour, took train from Paddington to Chrome Ash. The season of year was late October, and as I approached the coast I noticed that a great gale was blowing seawards. I am fond of Nature in her stormy moods, and as I had the compartment to myself, I opened the window and put out my head to inhale the breeze.

I arrived at Chrome Ash between five and six in the evening. Twilight was already falling and rain was pouring in torrents. It was a desolate little wayside station, and I happened to be the only passenger who left the train. A nicely-appointed brougham and a pair of horses were waiting outside, and with her head poked out of the window, looking eagerly around, I saw the pretty face of Mrs Kruse.

'Ah, you have come; that is good,' she said. 'I determined to meet you myself. Now, step in, won't you? I

have brought the brougham, for the night is so wild. We have a long drive before us, over ten miles—I hope you won't object to my company.'

I assured her to the contrary, and seated myself by her side. As I intended to return to town on the following day, I had only brought my suit-case with me. This was placed beside the driver, and we started off at a round pace in the direction of Castle Lewin.

To get to this out-of-the-way part of the country we had to skirt the coast, and the wind was now so high that the horses had to battle against it. The roads were in many places unprotected, and less sure-footed beasts might have been in danger of coming to grief as they rounded promontories and skirted suspicious-looking landslips.

The drive took over an hour, and long before we reached Castle Lewin darkness enveloped us. But at last we entered a long avenue, the horses dashed forward, the carriage made an abrupt turn, and I saw before me an old-fashioned, low house with a castellated roof and a tower at one end. We drew up before a deep porch, a manservant ran down some steps, flung open the door of the brougham, and helped Mrs Kruse to alight.

'See that Mr Gilchrist's luggage is taken to his room,' she said, 'and please tell your master and Mr Lewin that we have returned. Come this way, please, Mr Gilchrist.'

She led me into a square and lofty hall, the walls of which were decorated with different trophies of the chase. The floor was of ash, slippery and dark with age, and although the evening was by no means cold, a fire burned on the hearth at one side of the room. The fire looked cheerful, and I stepped up to it not unwillingly.

'From the first of October to the first of May I never allow that fire to go out,' said the young hostess, coming forward and rubbing her hands before the cheerful blaze. 'This, as I have told you, Mr Gilchrist, is a solitary place, and we need all the home comforts we can get. I am

vexed that my husband is not in to receive you—but, ah! I hear him.' She started and listened attentively.

A side door which I had not before noticed opened, and Kruse and his extraordinary dark companion both entered the room. They were accompanied by a couple of pointers, and were both dressed in thick jerseys and knickerbockers. Kruse offered me his hand in a calm, nonchalant manner, but Lewin who could evidently never check his impetuosity, came eagerly forward, grasped my hand as if in a vice, and said, with emphasis:

'We are much obliged to you, Mr Gilchrist—welcome to Castle Lewin. I am sorry the night is such a bad one, or, late as it is, we might have had a walk round the place before dinner.'

'No, no, Paul,' said Mrs Kruse, 'you must not think of taking Mr Gilchrist out again—he has had a long railway journey and a tiring drive, and would, I am sure, like to go to his room now to rest and dress for dinner.'

'I will show you the way,' said Kruse.

He took me up a low flight of stairs—we turned down a corridor, and he threw open the door of a pleasant, modern-looking bedroom. A fire blazed here also, the curtains were drawn at the windows, and the whole place looked cheery and hospitable. My host stepped forward, stirred up the fire to a more cheerful blaze, put on a log or two, and telling me that dinner would be announced by the sounding of a gong, left me to my own meditations.

I stood for a short time by the fire, and then proceeded to dress. By and by the gong sounded through the house, and I went down-stairs into the hall. The pointers were lying in front of the fire, and a great mastiff had now joined their company. The mastiff glanced at me out of two blood-shot eyes, and growled angrily as I approached. I am always fond of dogs, and pretending not to notice the creature's animosity, patted him on his head. He looked up at me in some astonishment, his growls ceased; he rose slowly on

his haunches, and not only received my caresses favourably, but even went to the length of rubbing himself against my legs. At this moment Mrs Kruse, in a pretty evening dress, tripped into the hall.

‘Ah, there you are,’ she said, ‘and I see Demoniac has made friends with you. He scarcely ever does that with any one.’

At this instant Lewin and Kruse entered the hall. I gave my arm to Mrs Kruse, and we went into the dining-room. During dinner the gale became more tempestuous, and Kruse and his wife entertained me with tales of shipwreck and disaster.

The cloth was removed, and an old mahogany table, nearly black with age and shining like a looking-glass, reflected decanters of wine and a plentiful dessert.

‘Pass the wine round,’ said Lewin. ‘Pray, Mr Gilchrist, help yourself. I can recommend that port. It has been in bins at Castle Lewin since ’47, and is mellow enough to please any taste.’

So it was, being pale in colour and apparently mild and harmless as water. I drank a couple of glasses, but when the bottle was passed to me a third time, refused any more.

‘I never exceed two glasses,’ I said, ‘and perhaps as we have a good deal to do and to see . . .’

‘I understand,’ said Mrs Kruse, who was still seated at the table. ‘We will have coffee brought to us in my husband’s study; shall we go there now?’ She rose as she spoke, and we followed her out of the room. We crossed the hall, where the fire still smouldered on the hearth, and entered a large low-ceiled room at the opposite side. Here lamps were lit and curtains drawn; the place looked snug and cheerful.

‘We may as well look over your document before we repair to the laboratories, Mr Gilchrist,’ said Kruse. ‘I gather from what you said in town that you do not care to impart any of your knowledge to us until we have signed the agreement.’

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'I have brought it with me,' I answered. 'With your permission I will go and fetch it.'

I left the room, went up to my bedroom, took my lawyer's hastily prepared agreement from its place in my suit-case, and returned to the study. As I did so, the following words fell upon my ears—

'It will be the third cup, Carl—you will not forget?'

I could not hear Kruse's reply, but the words uttered by his wife struck on my ears for a fleeting moment with a sense of curiosity, then I forgot all about them. The full meaning of that apparently innocent sentence was to return to me later.

Lewin, who was standing on the hearth with his hands behind him, motioned me to a chair. Mrs Kruse sat down by the table—she leant her elbows on it, revealing the pretty contour of her rounded arms; her eyes were bright her cheeks slightly flushed—she certainly was a very pretty young woman; but now, as I gave her a quick, keen glance, I observed for the first time a certain hardness round the lines of her mouth, and also a steely gleam in the blue of her eyes which made me believe it just possible that she might have another side to her character. As I looked at her she returned my gaze fully and steadily—then raising her voice she spoke with some excitement.

'Carl,' she said, 'Mr Gilchrist is ready, and we have no time to lose. Remember that tonight, if all goes well, we perfect the great explosive. Now, then, to work.'

'Here is the agreement,' I said, taking the lawyer's document out of its blue envelope. 'Will you kindly read it? We can then affix our signatures, and the matter is arranged.'

Kruse was the first to read the document. I watched his eyes as they travelled with great speed over the writing. Then he drew up his chair to the table, and dipped his pen in ink preparatory to signing his signature.

‘Hold a moment,’ I said, ‘we ought to call in a servant to witness this.’

A slightly startled look flitted across Mrs Kruse’s face, but after an instant’s hesitation she rose and rang the bell.

The footman appeared; he watched us as we put our names at the end of the paper, and then added his own signature underneath. When he had left the room Kruse spoke.

‘Now that matter is settled,’ he said, ‘and we can set to work. You know, I think, Mr Gilchrist, exactly how far we have gone.’ Here he produced his pocket-book and began to read aloud.

I listened attentively—Mrs Kruse and Lewin stood near—I noticed that Mrs Kruse breathed a little quicker than usual; her breath seemed now and then to come from her body with a sort of pant.

‘At this point we are stuck,’ said Kruse, pulling up short. ‘We have tried every known method, but we cannot overcome this difficulty.’

‘And for the success of the experiment,’ I interrupted, ‘it is almost an initial knowledge.’

‘Quite so, quite so,’ said Lewin.

‘I can put you right,’ I said, ‘you are working with a wrong formula—you do not know, perhaps.’ I then began to explain to them the action of a substance as yet never used in the combination in which I had worked it. I was interrupted in my speech by Kruse.

‘Anna,’ he said, ‘get paper. Write down slowly and carefully every word that Mr Gilchrist says. Now, then, sir, we are ready to listen. Are you all right, Anna?’

‘Quite,’ she answered.

I began to explain away the main difficulty. Mrs Kruse wrote down my words one by one as they fell from my lips. Now and then she raised her eyes to question me, and her use of technical terms showed me that she was completely at home with the subject.

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'By Jove! Why did we not think of that for ourselves?' said Lewin, interlarding his remark with a great oath.

'We are extremely obliged to you, Mr Gilchrist,' said Kruse. 'This sweeps away every difficulty, the discovery is complete.'

'Complete? I can scarcely believe it,' said Mrs Kruse.

At this moment the servant entered with coffee; it was laid on the table and we each took a cup.

'You told me,' I said, when I had drained off the contents of the tiny cup which had been presented to me, 'that you have failed in this initial difficulty, and yet you have conquered in a matter which baffles me.' I then named the point beyond which I could not get.

'Yes, we certainly know all about that,' said Kruse.

'You will give me your information?'

'Of course, but the best way of doing so is by showing you the experiment itself.'

'That will do admirably,' I replied.

'If you are ready we will go now,' said Mrs Kruse.

She started up as she spoke, and led the way.

We left the study, and, going down some passages, found ourselves in the open air. We were now in a square yard, surrounded on all sides by buildings. Lewin walked first, carrying the lantern. Its light fell upon an object which caused me to start with surprise. This was nothing less than a balloon about twenty feet in diameter, which was tied down with ropes and securely fastened to an iron ring in the pavement. It swayed to and fro in the gusts of wind.

'Halloa!' I cried, in astonishment, 'what is this?'

'Our favourite chariot,' answered Mrs Kruse, with a laugh. 'Wait a moment, Paul, won't you? I want to show our balloon to Mr Gilchrist. Is it not a beauty?' she added, looking in my face.

'I do not see any car,' I replied.

'The car happens to be out of order. You do not know, perhaps, Mr Gilchrist, that I am an accomplished aeronaut.'

I do not think I enjoy anything more than my sail in the air. It was only last Monday . . .'

'My dear Anna, if you get on that theme we shall not reach the laboratories tonight,' interrupted her husband. 'This way, please, Mr Gilchrist.'

He opened a door as he spoke, and I found myself in a large laboratory fitted up with the usual appliances.

Kruse and his companion, Lewin, began to show me round, and Mrs Kruse stood somewhere near the entrance.

The laboratory was full of a very disagreeable smell. Kruse remarked on this, and began to explain it away.

'We were making experiments until a late hour this afternoon,' he said, 'with some isocyanides, and as you are aware, the smell from such is almost overpowering, but we thought it would have cleared away by now.'

'I hope you don't mind it?' said Lewin.

'I know it well, of course,' I answered, 'but it has never affected me as it does now. The fact is, I feel quite dizzy.' As I spoke I reeled slightly and put my hand to my head.

'The smell is abominable,' said Kruse. 'Come to this side of the laboratory; you may be better if you get nearer the door.'

I followed my host.

'What is the matter with you, Mr Gilchrist?' said Mrs Kruse, the moment she looked at my face.

'It is those fumes, my dear,' said her husband; 'they are affecting Mr Gilchrist in a curious way—he says he feels quite dazed.'

'I do,' I answered. 'My head is giddy; it may be partly the long journey.'

'Then I tell you what,' said the wife, in an eager voice, 'you shall not be worried with any more experiments tonight. The best thing you can do is to go straight to bed, and then in the morning the laboratory will be fresh and

wholesome. Carl and Paul Lewin will experiment for you in the morning to your heart's content.'

'Yes, really it is the best thing to do,' said Kruse.

I sank down on a bench.

'I believe you are right,' I said.

My sensations puzzled me not a little. When I entered the laboratory I was full of the keenest enthusiasm for the moment when Kruse and his companion should sweep away the last obstacle towards the perfecting of the grand explosive. Now it seemed to me that I did not care whether I ever learned their secret or not. The explosive itself and all that it meant might go to the bottom of the sea as far as I was concerned. I only longed to lay my throbbing and giddy head on my pillow.

'I will take your advice,' I said. 'It is quite evident that in my tired state these fumes must be having a direct and poisoning effect upon me.'

'Come with me,' said Kruse. 'You must not stay a moment longer in this place.'

I bade Mrs Kruse and Lewin good-night, and Kruse, conducting me through the yard where the balloon was fastened, took me to my bedroom. The fire burned here cheerfully—the bed was turned down, the snowy sheets and befrilled pillows seemed to invite me to repose. I longed for nothing more in all the world than to lay my head on my pillow.

'Good-night,' said Kruse. He held out his hand, looking fixedly at me as he spoke. The next moment he had left the room.

I sank into a chair when he was gone, and thought as well as I could of the events of the evening, but my head was in such a whirl that I found I could not think consecutively. I threw off my coat, and without troubling to undress, lay down and fell into a deep and dreamless slumber.

* * / *

‘Have you got the hydrogen and chlorine ready?’

These words, whispered rapidly, fell upon my ears with distinctness. They did not disturb me, for I thought they were part of a dream. I had a curious unwillingness to open my eyes or to arouse myself—an unaccountable lethargy was over me, but I felt neither frightened nor unhappy. I knew that I was on a visit to Lewin and Kruse in Cornwall, and I believed myself to be lying on the bed where I had fallen into such heavy slumber some hours ago. I felt that I had slept very deeply, but I was unwilling to awake yet, or stir in any way. It is true I heard people bustling about, and presently a vessel of some kind fell to the floor with a loud clatter. A woman’s voice said, ‘Hush, it will arouse him,’ and then a man made a reply which I could not catch. My memory went on working calmly and steadily. I recalled how the evening had been passed—the signing of the document, the balloon in the yard, the horrible smell in the laboratory. Then I remembered as if I heard them over again Mrs Kruse’s words when I returned to the study, ‘*It will be the third cup.*’ What did she mean? Why should I be bothered with this small memory now? I never wanted to sleep as I did at this moment—I had never felt so unaccountably, so terribly drowsy.

‘I hope that noise did not wake him,’ said a voice which I knew was no echo of memory, but a real voice—I recognized it to be that of Mrs Kruse.

‘He is right enough,’ replied her husband. ‘I gave you enough narceine to put into his coffee to finish off a stronger and a bigger man—don’t worry. Yes, Lewin, ‘I will help you in a moment to carry him into the yard.’

‘The storm is getting less,’ said Mrs Kruse. ‘Be quick. Oh, surely he is dead!’ she added.

‘If not dead, all but,’ replied her husband. I tell you I gave him a stiff dose—he never moved nor uttered a sigh when we took him from his bedroom.’

Lethargic as I undoubtedly was, these last words had

the effect of making me open my eyes. I did so, blinking with the stupor which was oppressing me. I stared vacantly around me. Where was I?—what had happened? My limbs felt as if weighted with lead, and I now experienced for the first time since I had heard the voices an unaccountable difficulty in stirring them. I tried to raise my hand, and then I was conscious of a hideous pang—the knowledge flashed across me that I was bound hand and foot. I was, then, the victim of foul play, but, good God! What? What awful discovery had I just made? My memory was becoming quite active, but my whole body felt numbed and dulled into a lethargy which almost amounted to paralysis. Making a great effort, I forced myself to turn my head. As I did so a woman's face peered down into mine. It was the face of my hostess, Mrs Kruse. She turned quickly away.

‘He is not dead,’ I heard her whisper, ‘he is coming to.’

At that moment I knew where I was—I was lying on the floor of the laboratory. How had I got there?—what was about to happen? I found my voice.

‘For God's sake, what is the matter?’ I cried; ‘where am I? Is that you, Mrs Kruse? What has happened?’

The moment I spoke Mrs Kruse stepped behind me, so that, bound as I was, I could no longer see her face or figure. The light in the laboratory was very dim, and just then the huge form of Lewin came between me and it. He bent over me, and, putting his hand under my shoulders, lifted me to a sitting posture. At the same moment Kruse took hold of my feet. In that fashion, without paying the slightest attention to my words, they carried me into the yard where the balloon was fastened. The contact with the open air immediately made me quite wide awake, and a fear took possession of me which threatened to rob me of my reason.

‘What are you doing? Why am I bound in this fashion? Why don't you speak?’ I cried

They were dumb, as though I had not uttered a word. I struggled madly, writhing in my bonds.

'Mrs Kruse,' I cried out, 'I know you are there. As you are a woman, have mercy, tell me what this unaccountable thing means. Why am I tied hand and foot? If you really mean to kill me, for God's sake put me out of my misery at once.'

'Hold your tongue, or I'll dash your brains out,' said the ruffian Lewin. 'Anna, step back. Now, Carl, bring the ropes along.'

As the brute spoke he flung me with violence upon a plank, which ran across the iron hoop to which the meshes of the great balloon were attached. I struggled to free myself, but in my bound condition was practically powerless.

'What are you doing? Speak; tell me the worst,' I said. I was gasping with terror, and a cold sweat had burst out in every pore.

'If you want to know the worst, it is this. you are going to carry your secret to the stars,' said Lewin. 'Not another word, or I'll put an end to you on the spot.'

As he spoke he and his companion began to lash me firmly to the plank. My hands, which were already tied together round the wrists, were drawn up over my head and fastened securely by means of a rope to one end of the plank; my feet were secured in a similar manner to the other. Just at this instant a sudden bright flash of lightning lit up the yard, and I caught sight of a large dumb-bell-shaped glass flask, and also what appeared to be a tin canister. These Kruse held in his hand, and proceeded, with Lewin's assistance, to fasten round the underside of the plank, just under where I was lying. They were kept in their places by an iron chain. As soon as this operation was over Lewin began to slash away at the ropes which kept the balloon in the yard. I now found myself lying stretched out flat, unable to move a single inch, staring up at the great balloon which towered above me. It was just at that supreme moment of agony, amid the roaring of the gale, that Mrs

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Kruse coming softly behind me, whispered something in my ear.

'I give you one chance,' she said. 'The loop which binds your hands to the plank is single.' She said nothing more, but stepped back.

The next instant, amid a frightful roar of thunder, the balloon was lifted from its moorings and shot up into the night. As it cleared the buildings the full force of the gale caught it, and I felt myself being swept up with terrible velocity into the heart of the storm. Blinding flashes of lightning played around me on every side, while the peals of thunder merged into one continuous deafening roar. Up and up I flew, with the wind screaming through the meshes of the net-work, and threatening each moment to tear the balloon to fluttering ribbons. Then, almost before I was aware of it, I found myself gazing up at a wonderful, star-flecked firmament, and was drifting in what seemed to be a breathless calm. I heard the thunder pealing away below me, and was conscious of bitter cold. The terrible sense of paralysis and inertia had now, to a great extent, left me, and my reason began to reassert itself. I was able to review the whole situation. I not only knew where I was, but I also knew what the end must be.

'Hydrogen and chlorine,' I muttered to myself. 'The dumb-bell-shaped glass vessel which is fastened under the plank contains, without doubt, these two gases, and the tin canister which rests beneath them is full of nitroglycerine.' Yes, I knew what this combination meant. *When the first glint of the sun's rays struck upon the glass vessel it would be instantly shattered. The nitro-glycerine would explode by the concussion, and the balloon and myself would be blown into impalpable dust beyond sight or sound of the earth.*

This satanic scheme for my destruction had been planned by the fiends in human shape who had lured me to Cornwall. Having got my secret from me they meant to destroy all trace of my existence. The deadly poison of narceine had

been introduced into my coffee. I knew well the action of that pernicious alkaloid, and now perceived that the smell in the laboratory had nothing whatever to do with my unaccountable giddiness and terrible inertia. Narceine would, in short, produce all the symptoms from which I had suffered, and would induce so sound and deadly a sleep that I could be moved from my bed without awakening. Yes, the ruffians had made their plans carefully, and all had transpired according to their wishes. There was absolutely no escape for me. With insane fury I tore at my bonds. The ropes only cut into the flesh of my hands, that was all.

The storm had now passed quite out of hearing, and I found myself in absolute stillness and silence. I was sailing away to my death at the dawn of day. So awful were the emotions in my breast that I almost wished that death would hasten in order to end my sufferings. Why had not the hydrogen and chlorine exploded when I was passing through the storm? Why had the lightning not been merciful enough to hurry my death? Under ordinary circumstances they would certainly have combined if they had been subjected to so much actinic light. I could not account for my escape, until I suddenly remembered that in all probability the stop-cock between the two gases in the dumb-bell-shaped glass had only been turned just when the balloon was sent off, in which case the gases would not have had time to diffuse properly for explosion.

At the dawn of day the deadly work would be complete. The question now was this. how long had I to live, and was there any possible means of escape?

The action of the drug had now nearly worn off, and I was able to think with acuteness and intelligence. I recalled Mrs Kruse's strange parting words, 'The loop which binds your hands to the plank is single.' What did she mean? After all, it was little matter to me how I was bound, for I could not stir an inch. Nevertheless, her words kept returning to me, and suddenly as I pondered over them I

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began to see a meaning. The loop was single. This, of course, meant that the cord was only passed once round the rope straps which secured my wrists together. I nearly leapt as I lay upon my hard and cruel bed, for at this instant a vivid memory returned to me. Years ago I had exposed a spiritualist who had utilized a similar contrivance to deceive his audience. His wrists had been firmly tied together, and then a single loop was passed between them, and fastened to a beam above his head. He had been able to extricate himself by means of a clever trick. I knew how he had done it. Was it possible that my murderous hosts had tied my hands to the plank in a similar manner? If so, notwithstanding their sharpness, what an oversight was theirs!

In desperate excitement I began to work the cord between my wrists up and up between my palms until I could just reach it with my little finger, and by a supreme effort slipped it over my left hand. Great God, I was free! I could now move my hands, although they were still tightly tied together round the wrists. In frantic despair I began to tug and tear at the cords which bound them. Cutting hard with my teeth, I at last managed to liberate my hands, and then my next intention was to unfasten the horrible explosive from the plank. Here, however, I was met by what seemed to be an insuperable difficulty. The glass vessel and the tin canister had been secured round the plank by means of a chain, which was lashed in such a manner that by no possible means could I undo it. I was now free to move, but the means of destruction were still close to me. How long had I before the sun would rise? Even now the light in the heavens was getting stronger and stronger. What should I do? My hands were free and I could sit up. In another moment I had managed to untie the cords from my legs, and then, with many a slip and struggle, I contrived to clamber up the network till I came to the balloon itself, when I set to work to tear at the silk with my nails and teeth like

a man possessed. After almost superhuman efforts, I managed to make a very small hole in the silk. This I enlarged first with my finger and then with my whole hand, tearing away the silk in doing so till I had made a huge rent in the side of the balloon. As soon as this happened, I knew that the balloon would slowly, but surely, begin to descend. The question now was this: how soon would the sun rise? Perhaps in an hour, but I thought sooner. The murderous explosive was so secured to the plank that there was not the smallest chance of my getting rid of it. My one and only chance of life was to reach the ground before the sun got up. If this did not happen, I should be blown to atoms.

The stars were already growing faint in the heavens, and, sitting on the plank, holding the meshes of the balloon on either side, I ventured to look below me. I saw, with a slight feeling of relief, that the wind must have changed, for instead of being blown seawards, as was doubtless the intention of my murderers, I had gone a considerable way inland. I could see objects, trees, villages, solitary houses dotted in kaleidoscope pattern beneath me—it seemed to me as I gazed that the world was coming up to meet me. Each moment the trees, the houses, assumed a more definite shape. Within a quarter of an hour I saw that I was only about six hundred feet from a large park into which I was descending.

A grey, pearly tint was now over everything—this, moment by moment, assumed a rose hue. I knew by past experience that in five minutes at the furthest the sun would rise, and striking its light across the glass vessel would hurl me into eternity. In an agony of mind, I once more directed all my attention to the terrible explosive. I knew that in this fearful race between me and the sun the sun must win unless I could do something—but what? That was the question which haunted me to the verge of madness. I was without my coat, having been lashed on to the plank in my shirt, or I might have tried to cover the dumb-bell-

shaped glass from the fatal light. The feasibility of breaking the glass vessel, and so allowing the gases to escape, also occurred to me for an instant, but I was afraid to try it—first, because I had only my fists to break it with; and second, if I did, the blow might explode the nitro-glycerine. Suddenly I uttered a shout which was almost that of a crazy person. What a fool I was not to have noticed it before—there *was* a means of deliverance. By no possible method could I unfasten the iron chain which secured the infernal machine to the plank, but the plank itself might be unshipped. I observed that it was secured to the iron hoop by thick and clumsy knots of rope. With all the speed I could muster, for seconds were now precious, I gently worked the chain along the plank till it and the infernal machine had reached one end. I noticed with joy that here the chain was loose, as the plank was thinner. Seating myself on the hoop and clinging to the meshes with one hand, I tore and tugged away at the knots which secured the plank with the other. Merciful God! they were giving way! In another instant the plank fell, hanging to the hoop at the opposite side, and as it did so, the infernal machine slipped from the free end and fell.

I was now within three hundred feet of the earth, and, clinging for bare life to the meshes of the balloon, I looked below. There was a sudden flash and a deafening roar. In mid-air, as it fell, the machine exploded, for the sun had just risen. In another moment my feet had brushed the top of a huge elm tree, and I found myself close to the ground. Seizing the opportunity of open space I sprang from the balloon, falling heavily on the wet grass.

The instant I left it, the balloon, relieved from my weight, shot up again into space, and was lost to view behind the trees. I watched it disappear, and then consciousness forsook me.

I was picked up by a gamekeeper, who conveyed me to his own cottage, where I was well and carefully nursed, for

the exposure and shock which I had undergone induced a somewhat severe illness. When the fever which had rendered me delirious abated, my memory came fully back, and I was able to give a faithful and circumstantial account of what had occurred to a neighbouring magistrate. Immediately on hearing my story, the superintendent of police in London was telegraphed to, and a detachment of his men went to Castle Lewin, but they found the place absolutely deserted. My would-be murderers had beyond doubt received news of my miraculous escape and had decamped.

I have only one thing more to say. On my return to London, amongst a pile of letters which awaited me, was one which I could not peruse without agitation. It ran as follows:

‘You acted on my hint, and have escaped truly as if by a miracle. We are about to leave the country, and you will in all probability never hear anything of us again. But it gives me pleasure even in this crucial moment to let you know how easily you can be duped. Have you ever guessed how we got possession of that secret which was all yours and never ours? Do you recall the lady who, dressed as a nun, came to see you about six or seven months ago? You believed her story, did you not? May I give you one word of warning? In future, do not leave your alphabetically arranged note-books in a room to which strangers may possibly have access. Farewell.’

IX

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J. S. Fletcher

‘Guilty!’

The foreman of the jury uttered the fatal word with the hesitation of a man who is loth to voice the decision which deprives a human being of his liberty. He and his fellow jurymen kept their eyes sedulously away from the man in the dock; every one of them at some time or another had partaken of his good fare, drunk his vintage wines, smoked his cabinet cigars, and now . . .

‘You find the prisoner guilty; and that is the verdict of you all?’

‘We find the prisoner guilty, and that is the verdict of us all,’ repeated the foreman in dull tones. Something in his mien suggested that he was glad to have to say no more—he and his eleven companions in the cramped-in jury-box seemed to crave silence. They were wanting to get away, to breathe, to have done with an ugly passage in the life of their little town. What need of more talking? It had been impossible not to find their old friend and neighbour guilty. Of course he was guilty—guilty as Cain or Judas. Get the thing over.

The man in the dock seemed to share the opinion of the jury. His face was absolutely emotionless as he heard the fatal word drop limply from the foreman's lips, and he shook his head with something of a contemptuous smile when asked if he had anything to say as to why sentence should not be passed upon him. What was there to say?

'John Barr,' said the stern-faced embodiment of justice whom he faced. 'You have been convicted on the clearest evidence of the very serious crime of embezzlement. There were no less than nine counts in the indictment against you. It was only considered necessary to proceed with one—that relating to your embezzlement during the month of July, 1898, of a sum of three thousand seven hundred pounds, the moneys of your employers, the Mid-Yorkshire Banking Company—and upon that charge you have been found guilty. But it has been clearly established during the course of your trial that this sum forms almost an infinitesimal part of your depredations upon your employers' funds. It seems almost incredible to me, who know little of banking affairs, that it should have been possible for you to commit these depredations, but I note that the sums mentioned in the nine counts total up to the immense aggregate of one hundred and eighty-seven thousand pounds, and we have heard it stated by the prosecution that there are further sums to be accounted for, and that the probable total loss to the bank will exceed a quarter of a million sterling. Now there are several unfortunate features about the case, and not the least unfortunate lies in the fact that it is believed—and, from what I have gathered, justly believed—by the prosecution that a very considerable portion of the money which you have embezzled is at this moment, if not at your disposal, still within your cognizance. Appeals have been made to you from time to time, since you were first committed for trial, with respect to making restitution. All these appeals have been in vain. The last of these appeals was made to you here, in this court, this morning. You paid

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no regard to it. Now, if it be a fact that any part of the money of which you have robbed your employers is recoverable, let me beg of you to make proper restitution for the sake of your own conscience and the honour of your family, which, as I am informed, has long occupied a foremost position in this town. This has been a singularly painful case, and it is a painful thing for me, in the discharge of my duty, to feel obliged to pass upon you a sentence of ten years' penal servitude.'

John Barr heard his sentence with as little show of emotion as he had heard the verdict of the jury. He looked round the court for a moment as if seeking some face. A man sitting in a retired seat caught his eye—a man who bore a distinct resemblance to himself, and who had listened to the whole of the proceedings with downcast head. This man was now regarding the convict with an intent look. John Barr, for the fraction of a second, returned it; then, with a quick glance round him—the glance of a man who looks at familiar objects and faces for the last time—he bowed to the seat of justice, turned, and was gone.

The people who had crowded the court since the doors first opened that morning, streamed out into the Market Place. There were several cases to come on yet, but the great case of the day was over, and all Normancaster wanted to get somewhere—home, inn-parlour, by-way, anywhere—to talk over the result. Ten years' penal servitude!—well, it was only what anyone could expect. And a quarter of a million of money—and had John Barr disposed of some of it in such a fashion that he could handle it when he 'came out' of whatever penal settlement he would be sent to? Men were gabbling like geese over these questions, and particularly over the last, as they crossed the cobble stones of the Market Square, making for their favourite houses of resort.

Two men, leaving the court together, drew aside from the throng and turned into a quiet street. One of them, a

big, burly, bearded man was obviously excited, the other, an odd-looking little individual, dressed in an antique frock-coat and trousers much too short to reach the tops of his shoes, who wore a rusty, old-fashioned hat far back on his head, and carried a Gamp-like umbrella over his shoulder. You would have thought him an oddly-attired, respectable old party, who, after certain years of toil as operative, artisan, or the like, had retired on a competency. In that you would have been right—but (as you might have gathered from his impassive face, his burning eyes, his rigid mouth) he was something more. Yet working in the dark as he did, mole-like, none of the people in the court that day had known him for Archer Dawe, the famous amateur detective, expert criminologist, a human ferret—none, at least, but the man at whose side he was now walking.

This man led Archer Dawe down a side street to the door of an office which formed part of the buildings of a big brewery. He unlocked the door; they entered; he locked the door behind them. Then, without a word, but pointing Archer Dawe to a seat, he went over to a cupboard, brought out whisky, soda, and glasses, and a box of cigars, and motioned the little man to help himself. They had both lighted cigars, both taken a hearty pull at their glasses before the big, bearded man spoke—vehemently.

‘Dawe, it’s a damned plant!’

Archer Dawe took another pull at his whisky-and-soda.

‘What’s your notion, Mr Holland?’ he inquired.

Mr Holland stamped up and down his office for a few minutes. Then he fell to swinging his arms.

‘It’s a damned plant, Dawe!’ he repeated. ‘And that chap Stephen Barr is in it as well as John John’s going to take the gruelling—being the younger and stronger. He’ll be a model prisoner—he’ll get out in some seven and a half years. Lord! What’s that? And then . . .’

He fell to stamping the floor, to waving his arms again.

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‘You mean?’ said Archer Dawe. ‘You mean . . .’

‘I mean that they’ve got the money. It hasn’t gone on the Stock Exchange. It’s not gone on the Turf. It’s not gone over the card table. They’ve got it. It’s planted somewhere as safe as—as safe as I am standing here, Dawe! Did you see John give Stephen that look before he left the dock? Eh?’

‘I did,’ replied Archer Dawe.

‘Now, I wonder what that meant? But—or, hang it,’ exclaimed Mr Holland, ‘don’t let’s theorize—I want you to keep an eye on Stephen Barr. It’s lucky that nobody knew you here in Normancaster—they would think this morning that you were some old fogey interested in the Castle and so on, who’d just dropped into the Court for an hour or so—you know, eh?’

‘The matter stands thus,’ said Archer Dawe, slowly. ‘John Barr, who for ten years has been manager of the Mid-Yorkshire Bank here in Normancaster, has been to-day convicted of the crime of embezzlement and sentenced to ten years’ penal servitude. You, as a director of that bank, know that he has secured close upon a quarter of a million of your money, you, personally, believe that—eh?’

‘I believe, as a private individual, that both of them have been in at this, that John’s going to do his seven and a half years, and that in the meantime Stephen’s going off to some other clime, there to prepare a comfortable place for his brother,’ said Mr Holland. ‘Why bless me, John Barr will only be three and forty when he comes out, even if he serves his whole ten years—which he won’t. And Stephen isn’t anything like fifty yet. I’ve known them both since they were boys.’

‘Your plan of campaign, Mr Holland?’ said Archer Dawe.

‘Well, I have one, I’ll confess, Dawe,’ answered Mr Holland. ‘I’m going to have it communicated to Stephen Barr by a secret channel this afternoon that application

for a warrant for his arrest is to be made to the borough magistrates first thing to-morrow morning. I want to see if that won't stir him. Now, I happen to live exactly opposite his house, and I shall have a watch kept on his movements. I want you to stay here in my private office—there, you see, is a bedroom attached to it, with all conveniences, so that you'll be comfortable if you have to stay the night, and, of course, I'll see that you have everything in the shape of food and so on. If I telephone you that Stephen Barr makes a sudden move from his house, you'll be ready to follow him—you've plenty of disguises, I suppose?'

'Oh, yes,' answered Archer Dawe, with a glance at his old portmanteau. 'But, Mr Holland, do you think that Stephen Barr would set off from here like that? Wouldn't it look like—giving himself away?'

'No,' replied Mr Holland. 'And for this reason—Stephen Barr always goes up to town once a week—has done so for the last two years—why, nobody knows. He has no particular day, sometimes it's Monday, sometimes Thursday, sometimes Friday. My notion is that if he's startled by the rumour about the warrant he'll go to-night. If he does I want you to go with him, and to keep an eye on him.'

'Then in that case I shall hold myself in readiness an hour before the night train starts,' said Archer Dawe.

'And in the meantime,' said Mr Holland, 'I shall put you in charge of a confidential clerk of mine who will see that you are properly taken care of, and will be at your disposal. At half-past four tea shall be sent in, and at half-past six dinner—after that, Dawe, make your toilet, and be on the *qui vive* for the telephone. The clerk will be with you to the end—here, I'll have him in and introduce him.'

If anybody had been able to look through the carefully-closed blinds of Mr Holland's office at a quarter-past seven o'clock that evening they would have seen a dapper little gentleman who from his attire might have been a judge, a

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doctor, or a barrister, leisurely finishing a bottle of claret in company with a younger man who was obviously lost in admiration of his elderly friend's cleverness in the art of making up.

'Well, you're a perfect marvel in that line, Mr Dawe,' said the confidential clerk. 'I go in a good deal myself for amateur theatricals, but I couldn't make up as you do, sir. Now that you've got into these clothes and done your hair in a different fashion, you look another man. And it's your attention to small details, sir—that black stock with the old-fashioned gold pin, and the gold-rimmed spectacles instead of your ordinary ones—my word, those little touches do make a difference!'

'It's the details that do make a difference, young man,' said Archer Dawe. 'And no detail is too small or undignified...'

A sharp tinkle of the telephone bell interrupted him. He nodded to the clerk.

'Take the message,' he said. 'If it's from Holland, tell me word for word what he says.'

In another minute the clerk turned to him. 'Mr Holland says: "Barr has just left his house, obviously for the station. Tell Dawe to follow him wherever he goes."''

'Answer, "All right",' said Archer Dawe.

He drank off his claret as the clerk hung up the receiver again, and began to button his smartly-cut morning coat. His glance wandered to an overcoat, a rug, a Gladstone bag, and a glossy hat which lay out in orderly fashion on a side-table.

'There's lots of time, Mr Dawe,' said the clerk, interpreting the glance. 'You see, Barr lives opposite to Mr Holland, a good three-quarters of a mile from here. He'll walk to the station and he'll have to pass down this street—the station's just at the bottom. We can watch him pass this window—there, you can see out.'

Archer Dawe nodded. With a tacit understanding he and

the clerk posted themselves at the window, arranging one of the slats of the Venetian blinds so that they could see into the street beneath. There was a yellowish autumn fog there, and everything was very cold and still. No one came or went, up or down, until at last a man, cloaked to the eyes, carrying a bag in one hand, a rug in the other, hurried into the light of the opposite gas-lamp, crossed it, and disappeared into the gloom again. 'That's Barr!' whispered the clerk.

Archer Dawe looked at his watch.

'Eight minutes yet,' he said. 'Plenty of time.'

The clerk helped the amateur detective on with his fashionable fur-lined overcoat, and handed him his fashionable broad-brimmed silk hat and gold-mounted umbrella.

'By George, you do look a real old swell!' he said, with an admiring chuckle. 'Wish I could get myself up like that for our theatricals—it's fine.'

'Good-bye,' said Archer Dawe.

He slipped quietly out into the fog, and made his way, rug over arm, bag in hand, to the station, where he took a first-class ticket for King's Cross. There was no one on the platform but Stephen Barr and two or three porters, moving ghostlike in the fog. The mail came steaming in and pulled up, seeming to fret at even a moment's delay, a door was opened, Stephen Barr stepped in. Archer Dawe followed; the train was off again. He was alone with his quarry.

During the four hours' run to London these two scarcely spoke, except to remark on the coldness of the night. But as they were at last running into King's Cross and were putting away their travelling caps and arranging their rugs, Archer Dawe remarked pleasantly:

'It's a great convenience to have an hotel attached to these London termini—one doesn't feel inclined to drive far after a four hours' journey at this time of night and this season of the year. It's something to be able

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to step straight from the train into the Great Northern Hotel.'

Stephen Barr nodded.

'Yes,' he said, 'and a very comfortable hotel it is, too. I always stay there when I come to town—it is very convenient, as you say.'

'And to those of us who happen to be passing through town,' said Archer Dawe, with a marked emphasis on the penultimate word, 'it is much more pleasant to break the journey here than to be driven across London at midnight to another station. Old men like me, sir, begin to appreciate their little comforts.'

The same porter carried Stephen Barr's bag and Archer Dawe's bag into the hotel; the clerk in the office gave Stephen Barr number 45, and Archer Dawe number 46. Stephen Barr and Archer Dawe took a little hot whisky and water together in the smoking-room before retiring, and enjoyed a little friendly conversation. Archer Dawe was perhaps a little garrulous about himself—he gave Stephen Barr to understand that he, Archer, was a famous consulting physician of Brighton, that he had been north to an important consultation, and that he had spent a few hours at Normancaster on his way back in order to look over the castle. He also mentioned incidentally that he might stay in town for a day or two, as he was anxious to see one or two experiments which were just then being carried on in some of the medical schools. Stephen Barr thought his travelling companion a very pleasant old gentleman.

In the privacy of number 46, Archer Dawe sized up Stephen Barr as a man who at that moment was brooding over some big scheme and would probably be awake all night thinking about it. As for himself he meant to sleep, but he had first of all some work to do, and he set to work to do it as soon as the corridor was quiet.

Had any of the hotel officials seen what it was that Archer Dawe did they would have jumped to the conclusion that

a burglar was in the house. For he produced from his bag a curiously ingenious instrument with which he swiftly and noiselessly cut out of the door of his room a solid plug of wood about one-third of an inch in diameter—cut it out cleanly, so that it could be fitted in and withdrawn at will. Withdrawn, the orifice which it left commanded a full view of the door of 45 opposite: fitted in again, nobody could have told that it had ever been cut out.

This done, Archer Dawe went to bed. But early in the morning he was up and at his peep-hole, waiting there patiently until Stephen Barr emerged and made his way towards the bathroom. This was a chance on which Archer Dawe had gambled. He seized it at once. He darted across the corridor, secured the key of 45, and in a moment had secured an excellent impression of it in wax.

The specialist from Brighton, more talkative and urbane than ever, begged permission to seat himself at Stephen Barr's table when he entered the coffee-room and found that gentleman breakfasting alone. They got on very well, but Archer Dawe decided that his travelling companion of the previous evening was still deep in thought, and had spent most of the night awake. He noticed also that Stephen Barr had a poor appetite.

Going into the smoking-room an hour later, Archer Dawe found Stephen Barr in conversation with a man of apparently thirty years of age—a man who seemed to have a strong family likeness to him. They were in the quietest corner of the room, and their conversation was being carried on in whispers. Presently they left the room, and Arthur Dawe saw them go upstairs together.

After a time Archer Dawe walked out of the hotel, went across to the station, and wrote out two telegrams. The first was addressed to Robert Holland, Esq., Normancaster, and ran as follows:

'I have him here and under observation. He is in con-

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versation with man of apparently thirty, medium height, light complexion, sandy hair and moustache, blue eyes, wears eye-glasses, has strong resemblance to Stephen and John. Say if you know anything of this man.'

The other was addressed to a certain personage at Scotland Yard:

'Send Mason here in character of clergyman, to lunch with me at half-past one. Tell him to ask for Dr Archer, and to meet me in smoking-room.'

This done, Archer Dawe, carrying his wax impression with great care, took a hansom and set off to a certain establishment which he knew of, where, before noon, a quick workman turned him out a brand-new key. Getting back to the hotel a little before one he found a telegram awaiting him. He carried it into the smoking-room and opened the envelope.

'The man you describe is undoubtedly their nephew, James. He was at one time a solicitor, but was struck off the rolls three years ago, after conviction for misappropriation. Watch them both and spare no expense. Holland.'

Under the very eyes of Stephen Barr and his nephew, who were again conversing in a quiet corner, Archer Dawe tore this communication into minute shreds. He affected to take no notice of the Barrs, but he saw that they had a companion with them—a man, who, from his general appearance, he set down as a medical practitioner. Glancing at this person from time to time Archer Dawe formed the conclusion that he was much of a muchness with the younger Barr—there was something furtive, and shift-y, if not absolutely sinister in his face. And Archer Dawe was a past-master in the art of reading character in faces.

Whatever the conference was about between these three

it broke up just before Archer Dawe was expecting Mason. The two Barrs rose, shook hands with the third man, and walked with him towards the door.

‘Then I’ll expect you and Dr Hislop at seven o’clock to-night, doctor?’ said Stephen, in a loud voice. ‘We’ll dine and go to the theatre afterwards. And, by the bye, I wish you’d bring me another bottle of that medicine you gave me last time; I’ve had a touch of the old complaint again this morning.’

‘I will,’ replied the third man. ‘But if you’ve felt any symptom of that sort, let me advise you to keep quiet this afternoon. You’d better lie down for a while after lunch.’

Stephen Barr nodded and smiled, and the stranger left, as Mason, in the correct attire of a prosperous-looking clergyman, entered the room. He and Archer Dawe greeted each other in a manner befitting their respective parts, and were soon in apparently genial and friendly conversation. The two Barrs had retired to their corner again; in the centre of the room three young gentlemen in very loud clothes were discussing in equally loud voices the merits of certain sporting guns which they had come up to town to purchase. Otherwise the room was empty.

Archer Dawe gave Mason a brief outline of the case as it had so far been revealed to him. His notion, he said, was that some plot was afoot by which Stephen Barr was to get clear away without exciting suspicion, and that that plot was to be worked there, in the hotel:

‘And that’s why I sent for you,’ he concluded. ‘I can’t work the thing alone. I want you to find men who can keep a steady watch on every exit from this place and can be trusted to follow Stephen Barr wherever he goes, whether it’s day or night. I’ve a strong notion that some coup is in brewing for to-night.’

‘That’s done easily enough,’ answered Mason, ‘if we can keep a watch on him for the next two hours I’ll engage that he won’t move a yard without being followed. Here,

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I'll go round to the nearest station and telephone at once, and then come back to lunch with you.'

Two hours later the pseudo-clergyman and the pseudo-doctor having lunched together and afterwards taken their ease over coffee and cigars, the former again absented himself for a while, and came back smiling.

'That's all right, Mr Dawe,' he said. 'He can't move a foot out of this place without being shadowed—night or day. Make yourself easy. And now I must be off—let me know at the Yard if you want anything further, and let's hear how it goes on.'

Then the two separated, and Archer Dawe, knowing that his man was under the strictest surveillance, went out for a constitutional. Returning to the hotel just after six o'clock, he was met on turning out of the Euston Road by a plainly-dressed man who first smiled, then winked, and as he passed him, whispered his name.

'One of Mr Mason's men, sir,' he said, as Archer Dawe came to a standstill. 'The man has been out this afternoon. He and the younger man drove first to an office in Bedford Row, stayed there a quarter of an hour, and then drove to the Bank of Argentina. They were there half an hour; then came back here. They're safe inside, sir. We're keeping a strict watch—there's plenty of us on the job.'

Archer Dawe had a table all to himself that night at dinner. Mr Stephen Barr's party occupied one close by. There were five of them—Stephen himself, his nephew, the man Archer Dawe had seen with them that morning, another man whom he conjectured to be the Dr Hislop he had heard mentioned, and a lady of apparently thirty, whom he soon put down as the nephew's wife. There was a good deal of laughing and talking amongst the party, and Stephen Barr himself seemed to be its life and soul.

Dinner was nearly over, and Archer Dawe, straining his ears for all they were worth, and using his eyes when he dared, had neither seen nor heard anything that gave him

assistance. But there was suddenly a slight commotion at the next table. Looking round, he saw that Stephen Barr had fallen back in his chair, and was pressing one hand over the region of his heart—the other was crushing his eyes and forehead, whereon a frown as of deep pain had gathered. A groan was slowly forced from his lips.

The men at Stephen Barr's table sprang to their feet. One of them beckoned to a waiter. Ere the rest of the people in the room had grasped the situation, the three men and the waiter were carrying Stephen Barr away. The lady, obviously much distressed, followed in their wake.

Archer Dawe beckoned to the head-waiter, who was standing near.

'I'm afraid that gentleman's very ill,' he said.

'Yes, sir. I've seen him like that before, sir. It's his heart, sir. Well-known customer here, sir. Those two medical gentlemen have attended him here before, sir, often—Dr Hislop and Dr Brownson. Very weak heart, I should say, sir. Carry him off some day—sudden.'

Archer Dawe finished his dinner hurriedly and slipped upstairs to his own room, slipped into it unobserved by anyone. And once inside, he drew out the plug from the hole in the door, and settled himself for what might be a long and wearying vigil.

During the next hour Archer Dawe saw many strange things. A few minutes after he had posted himself with his eye to the peep-hole which his foresight had devised, the man whom he now knew as Dr Brownson came hurriedly out of 45, and sped away along the corridor. Archer Dawe heard the key turned upon him as he left the room. This was exactly at 8.20.

At 8 40 this man came just as hurriedly back. He was accompanied by a tall, middle-aged woman in the garb of a district nurse, and he carried a small black bag in his hand. He tapped twice at the door of 45, and he and the woman

'No, I don't know that I should—I am not squeamish about these things,' replied Archer Dawe.

'Well, sir, I thought it best to mention it to you. Certainly the—the body will not be in the house all night. As the doctors were well acquainted with the deceased gentleman's complaint they will be able to certify, so there will be no need for an inquest. A—a coffin is coming at half-past ten, sir, and they are going to remove the body to Normancaster, where the dead gentleman lived, by the night mail. These two gentlemen are going to make arrangements now, sir, I believe.'

Archer Dawe turned and saw James Barr and Dr Hislop descending the staircase. They passed him and the under-manager, went down the steps of the front entrance, and separated, Barr crossing over to the Station, and Hislop entering a hansom cab.

'No, you need not change my room, thank you,' said Archer Dawe to the under-manager, and left him not mind at all.'

He dawdled about the smoking-room—we found two went upstairs again. And once more securities on him. the hole in the door. At 9.10 +'

by the man whom he knew out of the hotel and across to locked the door and put +

nurse went along the and cried. 'The coffin—the coffin—cautiously opened in. We must have them. Get half-a-until he saw them.'

back. Now was + dispatched James Barr, Dr Brownson the three men who the nearest police-station in charge of what? constables, Archer Dawe, Mason and some

In another wondering railway officials broke open the had caused it, according to the plate upon it, the remains the lock of Barr were supposed to rest. There was a moment to be come when the lid was removed . . .

and found got, carefully and skilfully packed tight in one swivel.

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were instantly admitted. Once more Archer Dawe heard the key turned in the lock.

At 8.48 the door was opened again. Three people came out. One of them was the man who, from what the waiter had said, was Dr Hislop; another was James Barr; the third was the lady who had made the fifth at Stephen Barr's dinner-table. She leaned on James Barr's arm and held a handkerchief to her eyes. And again the door locked as soon as those leaving the room had crossed threshold.

Archer Dawe slipped out of his room as he thought these people would be clear of the corridors. He reached the hall in time to see the waiter assisting the lady into a four-wheeled cab. He held a handkerchief to her eyes and seemed to be crying. When the cab had driven away the door was closed. Archer remained in the hall for some minutes. Coming out of the room upstairs again.

Archer Dawe strolled out of the door, making pretence of examining the weather. Turning in again he was met by the under-manager, who smiled in an apologetic manner.

'I believe, sir,' he said, in a low voice, 'you are the gentleman in 46?'

'I am,' replied Archer Dawe.

'Well, sir, of course it is necessary to keep these sad affairs very quiet in an hotel, as you are aware. The poor gentleman in 45, the room opposite yours, is dead.'

'Dead?'

'Yes, sir—he died twenty minutes ago. Heart failure. You are, I believe, a medical man, sir. Yes, then you will understand. He had his own two doctors with him at the time—nothing could be done. He has had these attacks here before. I was wondering if you would like to be transferred to another room, sir?'

Perhaps a minute passed, and then a trap-door in the roof opened suddenly, and the head and shoulders of a man appeared darkly. He carried a small electric flashlight, and turned it about inquiringly. Finally he stepped out on the gravel, and glanced about cautiously, after which he made a tour of the roof. He paused inevitably at that point where I had seen the scintillant point of light, and, stooping—picked up a revolver! I had known it was a revolver and yet a sort of shudder ran over me. By the light he carried he examined the weapon, and I, from my window fifty feet away, shrouded in the night, looked with a curiosity no degree less than his. It was a singular appearing firearm—short, sturdy, and rather bulky as to barrel; indeed, it seemed to have two barrels, one above the other, in general

The Contents of the Coffin

were instantly admitted. Once more Archer Dawe heard the key turned in the lock.

At 8.48 the door was opened again. Three people came out. One of them was the man who, from what the waiter had said, was Dr Hislop; another was James Barr; the third was the lady who had made the fifth at Stephen Barr's dinner-table. She leaned on James Barr's arm and held a handkerchief to her eyes. And again the door was locked as soon as those leaving the room had crossed the threshold.

Archer Dawe slipped out of his room as soon as he thought these people would be clear of the corridor and the stairs. He reached the hall in time to see the two men assisting the lady into a four-wheeled cab. She still held the handkerchief to her eyes and seemed to be in great grief. When the cab had driven away the two men stepped back into the hotel and went to the manager's office. There they remained for some minutes. Coming out at length, they went upstairs again.

Archer Dawe strolled out of the door, making pretence of examining the weather. Turning in again he was met by the under-manager, who smiled in an apologetic manner.

'I believe, sir,' he said, in a low voice, 'you are the gentleman in 46?'

'I am,' replied Archer Dawe.

'Well, sir, of course it is necessary to keep these sad affairs very quiet in an hotel, as you are aware. The poor gentleman in 45, the room opposite yours, is dead.'

'Dead?'

'Yes, sir—he died twenty minutes ago. Heart failure. You are, I believe, a medical man, sir. Yes, then you will understand. He had his own two doctors with him at the time—nothing could be done. He has had these attacks here before. I was wondering if you would like to be transferred to another room, sir?'

'No, I don't know that I should—I am not squeamish about these things,' replied Archer Dawe.

'Well, sir, I thought it best to mention it to you. Certainly the—the body will not be in the house all night. As the doctors were well acquainted with the deceased gentleman's complaint they will be able to certify, so there will be no need for an inquest. A—a coffin is coming at half-past ten, sir, and they are going to remove the body to Normancaster, where the dead gentleman lived, by the night mail. These two gentlemen are going to make arrangements now, sir, I believe.'

Archer Dawe turned and saw James Barr and Dr Hislop descending the staircase. They passed him and the under-manager, went down the steps of the front entrance, and separated, Barr crossing over to the Station, and Hislop entering a hansom cab.

'No, you need not change my room, thank you,' said Archer Dawe to the under-manager, and left him. 'I do not mind at all.'

He dawdled about the smoking-room for a while, then went upstairs again. And once more he applied himself to the hole in the door. At 9.10 the nurse came out, followed by the man whom he knew as Dr Brownson. Brownson locked the door and put the key in his pocket. He and the nurse went along the corridor whispering. Archer Dawe cautiously opened his door and tip-toed after them until he saw them descend the stairs. Then he hurried back. Now was his chance! The two women were gone; the three men were gone. There could be nothing in 45 but—what?

In another instant he had whipped out the key which he had caused to be made that morning, had slipped it into the lock of the door behind which so much mystery seemed to be concealed, and had entered the room. His hand sought and found the electric light, and as it flashed out he took one swift glance around him.

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The room was empty. Empty! There was neither dead man nor living man in it. Everything was in order. Two large travelling trunks stood side by side against the wall; a large Gladstone bag, strapped, stood near them; a smaller one, which Arthur Dawe recognized as that which Stephen Barr had had with him the night before, stood, similarly strapped, on the stand at the foot of the bed. But on the bed itself there was no stark figure. The room was empty of dead man or living man.

Archer Dawe saw all these things in a moment. He turned out the light, re-locked the door, and went downstairs into the smoking-room, where he lighted a cigar and sipped a whisky-and-soda. On the other side of the room Dr Brownson was similarly employed. As Archer Dawe looked at him he thought of Holland's words of the previous afternoon. 'Dawe, it's a damned plant!'

But where could Stephen Barr be? How had he slipped out of the hotel unobserved? Well, anyway, unless he had very skilfully disguised himself, Mason's men would follow him. He must wait for news. At ten minutes past ten James Barr came back and joined Brownson; at twenty minutes past Archer Dawe, having somewhat ostentatiously betrayed symptoms of sleepiness and weariness, betook himself upstairs. And once more he glued his eye to the little peep-hole which his ingenious centre-bit had made the night before.

A few minutes later James Barr and Brownson came upstairs and entered 45. Five more minutes went by, and then the watcher heard the tread of several men's feet sounding on the corridor in the opposite direction. Then Hislop came into view—followed by four men carrying an oak coffin. Two other men came behind.

And now Archer Dawe noted a significant circumstance. When Hislop tapped at the door and James Barr and Brownson took the coffin from the men and carried it within the room. Then the door was locked. Five,

ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes went by—the door was opened. The six men entered the room—came out again, carrying the coffin. They went away with it by the way they had come, Hislop following them. Then James Barr and Brownson came out of the room, locked the door, and went downstairs. When Archer Dawe, following them, reached the hall, they were crossing from the hotel to the station.

At that moment a hansom, the horse of which had obviously been urged to its full extent, dashed up to the entrance. Mason sprang out and ran up the steps. He saw Archer Dawe—seized him.

‘Dawe!’ he exclaimed. ‘We got him—got him at Victoria! He was off for the Continent, and then for the Argentine. We got him to the Yard, and by George! he’s given us the slip after all—for ever! He must have had something concealed in a hollow tooth—he’s poisoned himself!’

‘Dead!’ exclaimed Archer Dawe.

‘As a door-nail!’ said Mason. ‘But—we found two hundred thousand pounds’ worth of securities on him. And . . .’

Archer Dawe dragged him out of the hotel and across to the station.

‘Quick, man, quick!’ he cried. ‘The coffin—the coffin—and the other three men. We must have them. Get half-a-dozen police—quick!’

When they had dispatched James Barr, Dr Brownson and Dr Hislop, to the nearest police-station in charge of certain stalwart constables, Archer Dawe, Mason and some inquisitive and wondering railway officials broke open the coffin in which, according to the plate upon it, the remains of Stephen Barr were supposed to rest. There was a moment of suspense when the lid was removed . . .

Lead ingots, carefully and skilfully packed tight in cotton-wool.

*The Mystery of
Room 666*

Jacques Futrelle

It was only a fleeting glimpse I caught of her as she sped along the brilliantly lighted hallway, past the half-open door of my room. A young woman she was, with the splendid grace of youth in her carriage, lithe as a leopard, supple of limb—a young woman, and yet such a face! Youth was no longer there—it had been obliterated by the merciless hand of sorrow; but beauty there was—the cold, colourless, deadly beauty of marble. Her lips were slightly parted, her great, dark eyes widely distended, and it seemed to me in that bare instant there was something of fear in them—horror even. Flying tendrils of her hair, escaping from the heavy veil, coupled with the pallor of her face, gave to her a weird, witch-like appearance.

For ten, perhaps fifteen, minutes I had been standing beside my open window overlooking the adjoining roofs, breathing in deeply the clean, cool, salt-tinged air swept in from the sea. I had been in my room no longer than that. I had not even paused to turn on the electric lights on entering, but had gone straight to the window, opened it, and had remained beside it, motionless there in the dark-

ness. Of late I had not been well. It was some absurd nervous trouble, accompanied by giddiness, a pounding of blood in my ears, and queer, throbbing pains in my head, which at times drove me well-nigh frantic. The breeze at the window was grateful; it dissipated the oppressiveness of the room, and the tormenting pains were eased.

As I say, I had been standing there some ten or fifteen minutes, staring out over the gloomy, uneven roofs below me. Perhaps you know the fascination of a single scintillant point in the darkness? Perhaps you know how it compels your attention? Well, after a little time I had noticed such a point of light, a mere glint on the roof of the house twice removed. I thought at first it was a fragment of glass shining by reflected light from some window in the hotel where I lived. For no other reason than the sheer brightness of it, I continued to stare at the point of light; and finally it seemed to become a tangible object! A revolver! The thought startled me a little. Yes, a revolver! The longer I looked the more certain I grew. The light was flashed back to me by the short nickelled barrel of it, and it seemed somehow to grow clearer as I looked. I couldn't see, and yet—I knew.

Perhaps a minute passed, and then a trap-door in the roof opened suddenly, and the head and shoulders of a man appeared darkly. He carried a small electric flashlight, and turned it about inquiringly. Finally he stepped out on the gravel, and glanced about cautiously, after which he made a tour of the roof. He paused inevitably at that point where I had seen the scintillant point of light, and, stooping—picked up a revolver! I had known it was a revolver and yet a sort of shudder ran over me. By the light he carried he examined the weapon, and I, from my window fifty feet away, shrouded in the night, looked with a curiosity no degree less than his. It was a singular appearing firearm—short, sturdy, and rather bulky as to barrel; indeed, it seemed to have two barrels, one above the other, in general

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shape not at all unlike an old-fashioned Derringer pistol . . . After a time the man disappeared down the trap, and gloom fell again on the roof. The scintillant point was gone!

All this was before I saw the woman in the hallway. I don't know just how many minutes had elapsed before my reverie was broken by the quick, distinct swish-swish of skirts. That, too, startled me a little, I think, because it seemed so near, almost in the room I whirled about. My door was half open—I had not been aware of it—and I took a couple of steps in that direction. It was then that the woman flashed by, along the lighted hallway. Brief as my glimpse of her was, I noted every detail—the deadly pallor of her face, the terror in her dark eyes, the splendid youth of her body.

Certainly it was not more than half a minute that I stood staring at the spot where she had been, and then, impelled by nothing save curiosity, unless, indeed, it was a suggestion of stealth in her manner, a mocking noiselessness in her tread, and the strangeness of her face, I went to the door and peered out. It was a hallway without turns in the direction she had gone, but she was not in sight. Obviously, then, she had entered one of the rooms beyond mine. Which one? I didn't know, and besides, it was no concern of mine. It was only midnight; there was nothing startling about her being there, and the fact that I had not heard a door open or close was of no consequence in itself. Yet I wondered which room she had entered. Perhaps it was simply that my imagination had been whetted by the singular incident I had witnessed on the roof.

I was just on the point of closing my door and turning on the electric lights when there came to me the muffled crash of a revolver shot! There was no mistaking the sound. It came from somewhere down the hallway, in the direction the woman had gone. For an instant I stood still, listening, but only for an instant; then I flung my door wide and ran out. I don't know just where I intended to go, or what I

intended to do. However, events in their natural course shaped my decision, for the door of Room 666 burst open almost in my face, and there was the woman coming out!

She paused at sight of me, and snatched her veil down, hiding her features.

‘What’s the matter?’ I demanded excitedly. ‘What happened?’

She didn’t answer; instead she tried to dart past me. Instinctively I put out both hands to stop her and seized one of her wrists. It slipped through my fingers, as a serpent might have done; I was pushed violently backward, stumbled a little, and went reeling against the wall behind me. When I straightened up again I was just in time to see the woman vanishing down the stairs.

I made no effort to pursue her; I didn’t even pause to investigate the cause of her flight. Instead I ran into my own room, three doors away, and telephoned to the office.

‘Someone has been murdered in Room 666!’ I explained hastily to the telephone girl. ‘A woman fired the shot. I tried to stop her, but she escaped and ran down the stairs. She is still in the hotel. Don’t let her get away.’

And then for a little time, I don’t know just what happened. My best recollection is of a sudden, crushing return of the hideous pains in my head, due probably to the quick excitement, and a sickening weakness in my legs. I may have fallen; I don’t know. Finally, I heard the rattle and clatter of the lift door as it opened, immediately followed by the rush of heavy feet in the hallway. I peered out. Here was the house detective, and with him Verbeck, the head night-clerk, a policeman in uniform, and a couple of frightened page boys.

‘Did you catch the woman?’ I queried breathlessly.

‘No,’ responded the house detective, Garron by name. ‘Was it you that ’phoned the office?’

I nodded. Garron stopped still and regarded me curiously. He was tall, slight, with deep-set eyes, and the face

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of a ferret, done in chalk. I don't believe I've ever seen another man who shows in his countenance so little the colour of life.

Suddenly he turned away and went on to Room 666, with the rest of us at his heels. The door stood wide open, and we paused at the darkened threshold, waiting for him to turn on the light. It came at last, a flood of it . . . The thing I saw there wrung a scream from my lips. It was the figure of a man lying prone upon the floor, face down, with his right hand outstretched towards us, grasping a revolver. Beside him was a dark crimson stain, and from that, leading backward into the room, disappearing beyond the bed, was a little trail of blood. It was as if, wounded, he had dragged himself across the floor. Perhaps he had been trying to reach the door, or the telephone beside the door.

'Is he dead?' demanded the policeman.

Not dead! My heart leaped, and then seemed to stand still. I laid a hand upon Verbeck's shoulder to steady myself.

Garron dropped on his knees beside the prostrate man, and pressed his ear to the body over the heart.

'He's dead all right,' he said brutally.

With the assistance of the policeman he turned the body over. Fascinated, unable to avert my eyes, I looked into the upturned face, and, looking, screamed again. I believe I should have fallen had not Verbeck been there to support me.

'Do you know him?' Garron asked abruptly. 'You, I mean, Mr Meredith?'

Thus directly addressed, I suppose I faltered. The horror of the crimson stains, the little trail the dying man had left behind him as he crept across the floor, the agony on the dead face must have unnerved me. I remember my heart was pounding frightfully, my head seemed bursting.

'Yes, I know him,' I replied, the words coming with an effort. 'Frank Spencer, his name is. I have known him for years; he's an old friend of mine.'

'You didn't happen to know he was stopping in the hotel?' Garron went on.

His deep-set eyes were glowing into mine with a fire which suddenly aroused an unaccountable anger within me; I seemed to feel a note of accusation in the curt, abrupt questions.

'Why do you ask?' I demanded defiantly.

'If he had been an old friend, and you had known he was in the hotel where you lived, in all probability you would have known the number of his room, particularly as it is only three doors from your own,' Garron explained, patiently. 'You 'phoned downstairs that someone had been murdered in Room 666. You didn't mention Mr Spencer's name—only the number of his room; therefore I assume that you did not know he was in the hotel?'

'No, I didn't know he was in the hotel,' I replied, hesitating at the vague menace in Garron's manner. 'I didn't know he was here.'

Garron turned to the night clerk.

'How long has Spencer been here, Mr Verbeck?'

'Nearly a week,' was the reply.

'As a matter of fact,' Garron went on, 'there has been no one living in this section of the hotel—I mean on this floor—for the last three or four days, except Mr Meredith, here, and Mr Spencer?'

'No one at all.'

'And certainly no woman?'

Verbeck shook his head.

'But there was a woman,' I blazed angrily. 'I *saw* her. If you had taken the trouble to guard the entrance to the hotel instead of rushing up here, where you can do a dead man no good, you might possibly have caught her.'

'If the woman was in the hotel when you 'phoned to the office she has not escaped, believe me,' Garron assured me quietly. 'Every exit is guarded; she would not be allowed to pass.'

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'If she *was* in the hotel?' I repeated. 'I *say* she was; I saw her!'

All this time Garron had been on his knees beside the dead man. Now he arose, said something aside to the policeman, who instantly turned and stared at me, from top to toe.

'We know you have been ill, Mr Meredith,' Garron was saying with quick courtesy, 'and this excitement has probably been too much for you. I would suggest that you go to your room, and if you have any stimulant there, take it. You are white as a sheet.'

Supported by Verbeck, I returned to my room. It was only a little while after that Garron rapped on the door and entered. Under the influence of a quieting potion I was quite myself again; the pains in my head had almost gone. He dropped into a chair

'The woman?' I inquired. 'Did they catch her?'

He shook his head slowly.

'No woman left the hotel from the time you 'phoned to the office,' he replied. 'If she is in the hotel she will be caught, take my word for it. I should like to have a description of that woman as you remember her, and just whatever else you know of all this.'

I told him, frankly, everything I have set down here, even to the apparently unconnected detail of a man having picked up what seemed to be a revolver on the roof two houses away. I concluded by giving him a minute description of the woman. During all that time he said nothing—only stared at me, stared until I came to feel a sort of hypnotic influence in the deep-set eyes.

'You didn't turn on the electricity when you entered this room, and you did leave your door open?' he queried at the end

'I didn't leave the door open,' I corrected. 'I remember distinctly having closed it behind me. It must have swung open.'

He arose, opened the door, then closed it casually. The bolt didn't catch; it swung back on its hinges. The incident, trivial as it was, brought to me a thrill of elation.

'Why didn't you turn on your light?' he resumed as he sat down.

'The room was hot and stuffy, I was feeling ill, and my first thought was to open the window.'

'I believe I stated the facts correctly when I said you had 'phoned downstairs that someone had been murdered in 666, did I not?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'You used the word "murdered"?'

'As I remember it I did.'

'Why?'

'I had heard the shot, I had seen the woman escape, and naturally my first thought was of murder,' I explained. 'I was excited when I went to the 'phone.'

'But you didn't know there had been *murder*!'

'No, I didn't *know* it.'

'You say you heard the shot. You didn't by any chance hear more than one shot?'

'Only one. Was more than one fired?'

'Two shots, at least. One of them entered Spencer's body in the back, just below the heart, the other was embedded in the woodwork of the door.' He paused a moment. 'The shot that was embedded in the woodwork of the door was fired from Spencer's revolver—the one he held in his hand when we found him.'

There was a pause.

'If the two shots had been fired simultaneously,' I suggested, 'there would have been the sound of only one.'

'If they had been fired simultaneously Spencer must have been standing with his back towards his assailant, and would have been shooting in the opposite direction,' Garron explained patiently. 'Therefore one of the shots must have been fired after the other.'

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I offered no explanation of this fact, an obvious one, now that he had called attention to it.

'I heard only one shot,' I insisted.

Suddenly the mask of courtesy dropped from Garron, his tone hardened.

'You didn't enter Room 666 from the time you heard the shot fired until I came upstairs?' he asked.

'No,' I replied.

'You are positive?'

'Absolutely positive.'

'You didn't so much as lay a finger on Spencer's body while you were in the room with me?'

'No.' I shuddered.

'Don't you know,' he went on mercilessly, 'don't you know that there was no woman concerned in this affair at all?'

The question brought me to my feet, and I stood for an instant swaying giddily under the blinding anger which possessed me. I tried to speak; no words came.

'As a matter of fact, now, what motive led you to murder Spencer?' Garron demanded.

'How dare you ask me such a question?' My voice came at last. 'You make a direct accusation. Why?'

'Your hand, man—your hand!' Garron exclaimed violently. 'The back of it is covered with blood. I saw it when you met us at the door just after we came up here. There, by Spencer's body, I called the policeman's attention to it.'

I glanced down at my right hand, amazed, speechless. Blood, yes—a great splotch of it; it seemed to expand and grow until there was a perfect crimson sea of it! How came it there? How could it have been there all that time to have passed unnoticed? So this was why Garron had suspected me from the first, and I had not misinterpreted his brutal questions!

... For a long time I remembered nothing... When semi-consciousness came I seemed to be looking down a

long, narrow passageway, hedged with steel bars. At its end hung a rope . . . A man was being bound and capped; he was shrieking . . . When I opened my eyes a doctor was sitting beside my bed. A few minutes later I was formally placed under arrest, charged with the murder of Frank Spencer.

On the following day a lawyer came to see me in my cell. He was an old friend of my father. He found me at the tiny wash-basin scrubbing the back of my right hand. He asked many questions in no way touching upon the murder, the while he studied my face, my eyes, with an expression of growing surprise.

‘I think perhaps you ought to know,’ he said gravely, ‘that the pistol with which you—with which Spencer was shot was picked up on the roof of the house two doors away.’

‘Yes. I told Garron that I had seen a man find it.’

‘It was thrown from a window of the hotel,’ he went on. ‘The servant in the house who occupied the room immediately beneath the spot where the pistol fell heard it strike, and thinking that someone was trying to force the trap-door, dressed and went up to investigate. He found the weapon, which proved to be a *Maxim noiseless*!’ I was silent. ‘It looks something like an old Derringer, the part underneath, which looks like a second barrel, is really the muffler.’

‘Yes, I know.’

‘Garron got possession of it,’ he continued slowly. ‘It was turned over to the police, and they managed to find a man who says he sold it. *He will swear he sold it to you! You paid for it with a personal cheque!*’

If he had expected to startle me with this accusation, he was disappointed. There were two shots fired in Room 666, according to Garron. If one had been fired with a noiseless weapon, of course I *could* have heard only one! In a way it was a point for me.

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‘My boy,’ the lawyer said solemnly, after a long time, and as he talked his stern eyes grew dim, ‘I’ve known you ever since you were a little chap. Then you were sickly, nervous—a weakling. I’ve watched you grow into manhood with an awful fear upon me of what was coming. It has come. Your mother died in a sanatorium. Thank God that neither she nor your father is alive now to know.’ He paused, and his eyes grew stern again; his lips were rigid. ‘As the friend of your father I shall do the best I can for you. But there’s only one thing to do—you must plead insanity!’

I came to my feet in a rage, my arms outstretched to throttle him. Across the back of my right hand was a great crimson splotch; I shuddered, and thrust it behind me.

‘You mean that you *believe* I am guilty?’ I almost screamed. ‘And you’ve just called yourself a friend of my father!’

‘The circumstantial chain is complete,’ said the lawyer gently, ‘perhaps with the exception of having established a motive.’

‘Ah!’ I exclaimed triumphantly. ‘There *was* no motive; there could be none. That’s where I shall beat them; and beat you, since you believe I murdered him.’

‘Insane men need no motives,’ was the answer. ‘I will admit, to please you, that you *believe* you saw this woman you mentioned; I will even admit that you don’t *remember* having shot Spencer. But you are not yourself, my boy. The disease that wrecked your mother’s life—well!’ he arose. ‘I shall plead insanity when you are arraigned.’

‘And I shall deny it!’ I declared violently. ‘I shall prove that I am not insane!’

‘The minute you do you send yourself to the scaffold,’ he said gravely, ‘and all the skill of all the lawyers in all the world won’t save you!’

... After a time he went away, and I lay stretched on my cot for hours, thinking, thinking... The blood splotch still glowed crimson on my right hand!... A long, narrow

passageway, hedged with steel, and at its end a rope! . . . Finally, I slept.

When I awoke some great change had been wrought in me. I saw clearly the way to save myself, to rend the circumstantial net which bound me. They all believed me guilty, even my own lawyer—this friend of my father! I would prove them mistaken, and I would prove it by evidence.

Strangely enough, I began by sending for Garron. He came into my cell with only a word of greeting, and seated himself opposite me, with expectation burning in his deep-set eyes, his chalky face expressionless.

‘It is not a confession,’ I told him. ‘I know you believe that I lied about having seen a woman pass my door, about having heard a single shot. I know that the blood-spot on my hand, coupled with the finding of a Maxim noiseless pistol, which is *supposed* to be mine, will be damning evidence in a court of law. I know all these things, and yet I am going to ask you to save me, because I know you to be clever, and I don’t believe you would do any man an injustice.’

‘Thank you,’ he said quietly.

‘In the beginning you must assume that my story of the woman is true,’ I continued ‘You need not really believe it, but you must act as if you *did* believe it—act, in other words, as if you were trying to save me rather than convict me?’

‘I understand ’

‘Only one question,’ I rushed on with the feverish exaltation of confidence and enthusiasm in my manner. ‘Was any trace found of a woman by any of your men? Did you find any?’

‘No,’ he replied. ‘If there was a woman she didn’t leave the hotel that night, and there was not one woman in the hotel who answers the description you gave. Not even a servant,’ he added. ‘I may say, too, that no one connected

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with the hotel remembers that a woman entered the building that night.'

'I am not assuming that she was in the hotel. She left it, and I dare say she left it within fifteen minutes of the time I saw her.'

'How?' he queried curiously.

'There are always fire-escapes,' I suggested. 'It would be only a drop of a few feet from the bottom platform to the ground; and behind the hotel at least two of these fire-escapes open on an alley. Now, the woman ran downstairs from the sixth floor, where my room is; therefore, if she did get away by a fire-escape, it was either from the fifth floor, or one below that. All the fire-escapes open by windows into the halls.'

'I hadn't thought of that,' he admitted frankly.

'As a matter of fact, when you saw the blood on my hand you were so firmly convinced of my guilt, that no particular effort was made to locate the woman, except to guard the exits, was there?' I asked. 'Now—we are always assuming that there *was* a woman—if a woman opened a window and clambered out upon a fire-escape, she would probably leave some trace of it somewhere. And, of necessity, she would be compelled to leave the window unlocked behind her.'

'Of course!' A strange expression was creeping into Garron's eyes. I was unable to read it.

'Further, it is well to remember that a woman is hampered by skirts,' I continued. 'That being true, she may have taken hold of the window-frame to pull herself up and—Heavens! Man! Don't you see? There is a chance she left a blood-stain on the window-frame, if she did touch it!'

For a minute or more Garron merely stared at me.

'In all this,' he said measuredly at last, 'we must forget, of course, the blood-stain on *your* hand?'

'No, don't forget it!' I exclaimed sharply. 'Remember

it! But remember, too, that I tried to stop that woman; that I even took hold of her wrist. She wriggled away like a snake, and pushed me backward against the wall. If—I leaned forward eagerly—‘if there was blood on her hand, *that’s where I got it on mine!*’

‘I hadn’t thought of that,’ Garron said again.

‘You hadn’t thought of any of these things, because you assumed off-hand that I was the murderer,’ I declared bitterly. ‘Yet you haven’t found a motive—you never will find a motive.’

Some subtle change was working in Garron’s face. Had I convinced him of this new possibility? I wondered.

‘I think you have a right to assume,’ he remarked finally, ‘that we didn’t go as far in our investigation as we should. Believe me, now, I’ll go to the end.’

‘And search Spencer’s room,’ I urged. ‘Search it closely. If that woman had dropped a handkerchief—a jewel—anything!’

He nodded. A fever of madness was upon me, but it was the madness of relief . . . He went away, and for hours, it seemed, I sat staring dully at the crimson splotch on the back of my right hand . . .

* * *

Garron came again about dusk. At sight of him I fairly leaped at the bars of my cell. The turnkey opened the door, and Garron entered, silent, inscrutable. Good news or bad? Which?

‘Well?’ I demanded fiercely.

‘On the ledge of the window which opens to the fire-escape from the hall of the fourth floor,’ he began, without preliminary, ‘I found certain scratches and marks, which may have been made by somebody clambering out at that window. The window was unlocked.’

I tried to shout my joy! I couldn’t. My vocal cords seemed paralysed; my body was tense.

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'It so happens,' Garron went on evenly, 'that the fire-escape has been recently painted. The even surface of the paint was broken by unmistakable marks of foot-prints—the foot-prints of a woman.'

Again I tried to speak; there was only an inarticulate cry. Then suddenly came again those crushing pains in my head; the cell spun about me.

'The paving in the alley beneath the fire-escape is cement,' Garron continued, 'so it is impossible to say whether anyone dropped from the last landing to the ground.'

'But the foot-prints?' I gasped. 'They would show if the woman was going up or down?'

'They indicate that she was going down,' came the cautious reply. 'Also I found on one side of the window-frame, at about the point where a person would take hold of it . . .'

'A blood-stain!' I burst out. It was too good to be true! . . . 'Thank God!'

'It seemed to be a blood-stain, a small one,' Garron corrected in the same unemotional voice. 'I cut away the wood with the stain on it, and have turned it over to a skilled analyst for examination.'

'And if he says it is a blood-stain?'

'Your story begins to sound plausible,' Garron answered in the same monotonous voice. 'Meanwhile, at your suggestion, I made another search of Spencer's room.' He paused, and there came some perceptible change in the ferret-like face, a narrowing of the deep glowing eyes, a tightening of the pale lips. It was warning enough. 'I found this,' he added.

Casually he extended his open hand. In it lay a tie-pin—a solitary ruby surrounded by pearls . . . I didn't scream . . . Again that long, narrow passageway, and at its end a rope! . . . Here was a critical point; he had tried to trick me . . . If I had so much as lifted my hand to my tie! . . .

'One of the page-boys has identified this pin as yours,' Garron was saying.

'Mine?' I queried, and I was surprised at the cool steadiness of my voice. 'No. I have one something like it, a pearl surrounded by rubies. You'll find it somewhere in my belongings.' I took the pin in my hand. 'In just what part of the room did you find this?'

'All the way across the room from where we found Spencer,' was the reply. 'It had been dropped near a window—the window from which the pistol must have been thrown. It's the only one in that room overlooking the roof; it was open.'

'Seems to me it's Spencer's pin,' I remarked, heedless of his other statements. 'I think I've seen him wear it. Anyway, it's of no value as a clue to the woman.'

'But,' Garron suggested quickly, 'if that pin is yours, if it could be *proved* to be yours, it would be the last link needed. You wouldn't have a chance to clear yourself.'

'True,' I agreed, and I smiled a little. 'I bought my pearl and ruby pin from Spink's. Perhaps there's a record there. And now this Maxim noiseless pistol,' I went on. 'The police are prepared to prove, I understand, that the pistol with which Spencer was killed—the one that was found on the roof—is one that I bought and paid for with a personal cheque?'

'Yes,' he nodded.

'I did buy such a weapon a few months ago, on the eve of my departure for Germany. I paid for it with a personal cheque, and either lost it, or it was stolen, in Berlin. There are possibly not more than three or four hundred of these pistols in existence; they are all alike, and they are not numbered. If the woman came to this hotel to kill Spencer, and she knew such a thing as a noiseless pistol existed, isn't it quite possible that she, too, purchased one? In that case she could have walked in and shot him, and walked away with no one any the wiser. I heard one shot. Now we

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know that was the shot fired by Spencer after he himself had been shot in the back!

After a long time Garron nodded his understanding.

‘Therefore, there remain only three things for you to do,’ I rushed on. ‘First, look through my belongings, and see if you can find the tie-pin with the pearl and small rubies, and if you don’t, go to Spink’s and satisfy yourself I bought such a pin; second go to the gun shop where I bought the noiseless pistol—it’s the sole agency in London—and see if one has ever been sold to a woman; third, find the woman who left the blood-stain on my hand, whose foot-prints lead *down* the fire-escape. You must find that woman! You’ve gone so far with me; you know there *is* a woman—she must be found!’

I extended both hands towards him in entreaty; on the back of the right still glowed that crimson splotch! I thrust it behind me, cursing.

I didn’t see Garron again for more than two weeks, but the following day I received a short note from him. It was like this:

‘I found the pearl and ruby pin in your belongings. It has been identified by Spink’s as one you bought there.’

Three days later there came a telegram for me, dated at a small town sixty miles from London:

‘Analyst reports that stain on window-frame is human blood. Garron.’

That’s all there was of it, but no man who has never stood in the shadow of death may know what it meant to me.

Then came a long silence, a week, ten days, and no word from Garron. Where was he? What was he doing in the small country town? My lawyer, this friend of my father, came to see me. I cursed him and he went away, shaking his head.

On the morning of the eleventh day Garron came, inscrutable of face, silent as ever. I beat upon the bars frantically at sight of him. The turnkey admitted him; he

dropped down on my cot and sat without speaking, while the gaoler's footsteps died away in the distance. Then from a pocket he produced a small paper parcel. He opened it, and held up—a woman's glove! Some cry escaped me: I reached for it.

'Keep your hands off!' he commanded sharply. 'There are bloodstains on it. Your life depends upon them remaining undisturbed.'

'You found the woman?'

'I found her—yes,' he replied quietly. 'I traced her through a photograph I found in Spencer's trunk. It was a picture of a boy, a mere baby, made by a photographer in a little Sussex town. I went to that town; the photographer told me whose boy it was. The woman is that boy's mother; the boy is Spencer's son.'

'Spencer's son?' I repeated incredulously. 'To my knowledge Spencer was never married.'

'There's the tragedy of it,' Garron responded gravely. 'It's the same old story—a woman who trusted a man. The boy was born and, in a way, Spencer was fond of him. He made liberal allowances to the mother, and they lived quietly in the small town. She is known there as Mrs Rosa Warren, a widow.'

There was a little pause.

'But the glove?' I demanded suddenly. 'Where did you get that? What has the woman to say? Where is she now?'

'She is under arrest,' Garron resumed. 'She admits that she went to Spencer's room about midnight at his request, and showed me his note making the appointment for a last conference previous to his departure for a long trip abroad. He was to transfer a sum of money to her.'

'And she shot him?' I broke in fiercely.

'Her story of what happened in that room is beyond belief,' Garron continued. 'She tapped on the door, she says; there was no answer. She opened it and went in, closing it behind her. The room was dark. She heard some

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sort of noise and spoke. After a moment came a pistol shot—the shot you heard. She thought Spencer was trying to kill her—remember, this is her story—and opened the door to escape. She ran almost into your arms. You seized her; she struggled free, and ran down two flights of stairs. She knew there would be an alarm, and more to hide her own shame than anything else, she went through a window to a fire-escape, and thence to the ground. The drop from the last platform is only about eight feet.'

The tortures of hell broke loose in my brain. I rose, clasped both my hands to my head, and fell prone. Garron lifted me to the cot. After a long time he went on:

'Of course, now we know the motive for the murder. She loved this man. He had deceived her, and he was going away. At the gun-shop a clerk remembered that a noiseless pistol had been sold to a woman, but it is doubtful if she could be identified after so long a time. Of course, she denies this. And the glove!'

Again he held it aloft; I turned on the cot and stared at it fascinated.

'I found it in her house,' Garron went on calmly. 'There had been no attempt to conceal it, or even clean it. I think that's all. I believe the woman will confess.'

'And she would have let me go to the scaffold!' I complained.

... A long, narrow passageway, hedged with steel. At its end was a rope... A woman was being bound... She was shrieking!

I was arraigned and dismissed without trial. The woman had made further statements of a damaging nature, and despite her pitiful protestations of innocence, she was held. The chain of evidence against her was complete. I remember only the final words of the judge who set me free.

'... an insane man who, by the sheer cunning of his madness, has broken down the circumstantial evidence against himself and proven the probable guilt of a woman

now under arrest. The prisoner is discharged in the custody of his friends.'

Two days after that I went into the consulting room of a surgeon and held out my right hand.

'Please amputate that hand at the wrist,' I requested.

He stared at me as if I were mad.

'Amputate it?' he repeated. 'Why?'

'It's covered with blood, and it won't come off,' I told him.

* * *

Mr Howard Meredith, whose statement is set forth above, committed suicide four days after he was set free. In a short note, incoherent and barely decipherable, he said:

'It is not just that a woman should die for what she did not do. I killed Spencer. I shot him in the back and I thought I had killed him; then threw the pistol out of a window. He had said I was insane, so my act was justifiable. He shot at the woman who entered in the dark, thinking it was me. I bought the tie-pin in Germany. Garron is a fool; so is the judge who set me free.'

XI

The Man Who Cut Off My Hair

Richard Marsh

My name is Judith Lee. I am a teacher of the deaf and dumb. I teach them by what is called the oral system—that is, the lip-reading system. When people pronounce a word correctly they all make exactly the same movements with their lips, so that, without hearing a sound, you only have to watch them very closely to know what they are saying. Of course, this needs practice, and some people do it better and quicker than others. I suppose I must have a special sort of knack in that direction, because I do not remember a time when, by merely watching people speaking at a distance, no matter at what distance if I could see them clearly, I did not know what they were saying. In my case the gift, or knack, or whatever it is, is hereditary. My father was a teacher of the deaf and dumb—a very successful one. His father was, I believe, one of the originators of the oral system. My mother, when she was first married, had an impediment in her speech which practically made her dumb; though she was stone deaf, she became so expert at lip-reading that she could not only tell what others were saying, but she could speak herself—audibly, although she could not hear her own voice.

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So, you see, I have lived in the atmosphere of lip-reading all my life. When people, as they often do, think my skill at it borders on the marvellous, I always explain to them that it is nothing of the kind, that mine is simply a case of 'practice makes perfect.' This knack of mine, in a way, is almost equivalent to another sense. It has led me into the most singular situations, and it has been the cause of many really extraordinary adventures. I will tell you of one which happened to me when I was quite a child, the details of which have never faded from my memory.

My father and mother were abroad, and I was staying, with some old and trusted servants, in a little cottage which we had in the country. I suppose I must have been between twelve and thirteen years of age. I was returning by train to the cottage from a short visit which I had been paying to some friends. In my compartment there were two persons beside myself—an elderly woman who sat in front of me, and a man who was at the other end of her seat. At a station not very far from my home the woman got out; a man got in and placed himself beside the one who was already there. I could see they were acquaintances—they began to talk to each other.

They had been talking together for some minutes in such low tones that you could not only not hear their words, you could scarcely tell that they were speaking. But that made no difference to me; though they spoke in the tiniest whisper I had only to look at their faces to know exactly what they were saying. As a matter of fact, happening to glance up from the magazine I was reading, I saw the man who had been there first say to the other something which gave me quite a start. What he said was this (I only saw the fag-end of the sentence):

'... Myrtle Cottage; it's got a great, old myrtle in the front garden.'

The other man said something, but as his face was turned from me I could not see what; the tone in which he spoke

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was so subdued that hearing was out of the question. The first man replied (whose face was to me):

‘His name is Colegate. He’s an old bachelor, who uses the place as a summer cottage. I know him well—all the dealers know him. He’s got some of the finest old silver in England. There’s a Charles II salt-cellar in the place which would fetch twenty pounds an ounce anywhere.’

The other man sat up erect and shook his head, looking straight in front of him, so that I could see what he said, though he spoke only in a whisper.

‘Old silver is no better than new; you can only melt it.’

The other man seemed to grow quite warm.

‘Only melt it! Don’t be a fool; you don’t know what you’re talking about. I can get rid of old silver at good prices to collectors all over the world; they don’t ask too many questions when they think they’re getting a bargain. That stuff at Myrtle Cottage is worth to us well over a thousand; I shall be surprised if I don’t get more for it.’

The other man must have glanced at me while I was watching his companion speak. He was a fair-haired man, with a pair of light blue eyes, and quite a nice complexion. He whispered to his friend:

‘That infernal kid is watching us as if she were all eyes.’

The other said: ‘Let her watch. Much good may it do her; she can’t hear a word—goggle-eyed brat!’

What he meant by ‘goggle-eyed’ I didn’t know, and it was true that I could not hear; but, as it happened, it was not necessary that I should. I think the other must have been suspicious, because he replied, if possible, in a smaller whisper than ever:

‘I should like to twist her skinny neck and throw her out on to the line.’

He looked as if he could do it too; such an unpleasant look came into his eyes that it quite frightened me. After all, I was alone with them; I was quite small; it would have

been perfectly easy for him to have done what he said he would like to. So I glanced back at my magazine, and left the rest of their conversation unwatched.

But I had heard, or rather seen, enough to set me thinking. I knew Myrtle Cottage quite well, and the big myrtle tree; it was not very far from our own cottage. And I knew Mr Colegate and his collection of old silver—particularly that Charles II salt-cellar of which he was so proud. What interest had it for these two men? Had Mr Colegate come to the cottage? He was not there when I left. Or had Mr and Mrs Baines, who kept house for him—had they come? I was so young and so simple that it never occurred to me that there could be anything sinister about these two whispering gentlemen.

They both of them got out at the station before ours. Ours was a little village station, with a platform on only one side of the line, the one at which they got out served for quite an important place—our local market town. I thought no more about them, but I did think of Mr Colegate and of Myrtle Cottage. Dickson, our housekeeper, said that she did not believe that anyone was at the cottage, but she owned that she was not sure. So after tea I went for a stroll, without saying a word to anyone—Dickson had such a troublesome habit of wanting to know exactly where you were going. My stroll took me to Myrtle Cottage.

It stood all by itself in a most secluded situation on the other side of Woodbarrow Common. You could scarcely see the house from the road—it was quite a little house. When I got into the garden and saw that the front-room window was open I jumped to the very natural conclusion that some one must be there. I went quickly to the window—I was on the most intimate terms with everyone about the place; I should never have dreamt of announcing my presence in any formal manner—and looked in. What I saw did surprise me.

In the room was the man of the train—the man who had

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been in my compartment first. He had what seemed to me to be Mr Colegate's entire collection of old silver spread out on the table in front of him, and that very moment he was holding up that gem of the collection—the Charles II salt-cellar. I had moved very quietly, meaning to take Mr Colegate—if it was he—by surprise; but I doubt if I had made a noise that that man would have heard me, he was so wrapped up in that apple of Mr Colegate's eye.

I did not know what to make of it at all. I did not know what to think. What was that man doing there? What was I to do? Should I speak to him? I was just trying to make up my mind when some one from behind lifted me right off my feet and, putting a hand to my throat, squeezed it so tightly that it hurt me.

'If you make a sound I'll choke the life right out of you. Don't you make any mistake about it—I will!'

He said that out loudly enough, though it was not so very loud either—he spoke so close to my ear. I could scarcely breathe, but I could still see, and I could see that the man who held me so horribly by the throat was the second man of the train. The recognition seemed to be mutual.

'If it isn't that infernal brat! She seemed to be all eyes in the railway carriage, and, my word, she seems to have been all ears too.'

The first man had come to the window.

'What's up?' he asked. 'Who's that kid you've got hold of there?'

My captor twisted my face round for the other to look at.

'Can't you see for yourself? I felt, somehow, that she was listening.'

'She couldn't have heard, even if she was; no one could have heard what we were saying. Hand her in here.' I was passed through the window to the other, who kept as tight a grip on my throat as his friend had done.

'Who are you?' he asked. 'I'll give you a chance to

answer, but if you try to scream I'll twist your head right off you.'

He loosed his grip just enough to enable me to answer if I wished. But I did not wish. I kept perfectly still. His companion said:

'What's the use of wasting time? Slit her throat and get done with it.'

He took from the table a dreadful-looking knife, with a blade eighteen inches long, which I knew very well. Mr Colegate had it in his collection because of its beautifully chased, massive silver handle. It had belonged to one of the old Scottish chieftains; Mr Colegate would sometimes make me go all over goose-flesh by telling me of some of the awful things for which, in the old, lawless, blood-thirsty days in Scotland, it was supposed to have been used. I knew that he kept it in beautiful condition, with the edge as sharp as a razor. So you can fancy what my feelings were when that man drew the blade across my throat, so close to the skin that it all but grazed me.

'Before you cut her throat,' observed his companion, 'we'll tie her up. We'll make short work of her. This bit of rope will about do the dodge.'

He had what looked to me like a length of clothes-line in his hand. With it, between them, they tied me to a great oak chair, so tight that it seemed to cut right into me, and, lest I should scream with the pain, the man with the blue eyes tied something across my mouth in a way which made it impossible for me to utter a sound. Then he threatened me with that knife again, and just as I made sure he was going to cut my throat he caught hold of my hair, which, of course, was hanging down my back, and with that dreadful knife sawed the whole of it from my head.

If I could have got within reach of him at that moment I believe that I should have stuck that knife into him. Rage made me half beside myself. He had destroyed what was almost the dearest thing in the world to me—not

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because of my own love of it, but on account of my mother's. My mother had often quoted to me, 'The glory of a woman is her hair,' and she would add that mine was very beautiful. There certainly was a great deal of it. She was so proud of my hair that she had made me proud of it too—for her sake. And to think that this man could have robbed me of it in so hideous a way! I do believe that at the moment I could have killed him.

I suppose he saw the fury which possessed me, because he laughed and struck me across the face with my own hair.

'I've half a mind to cram it down your throat,' he said. 'It didn't take me long to cut it off, but I'll cut your throat even quicker—if you so much as try to move, my little dear.'

The other man said to him:

'She can't move and she can't make a sound either. You leave her alone. Come over here and attend to business.'

'I'll learn her,' replied the other man, and he lifted my hair above my head and let it fall all over me.

They proceeded to wrap up each piece of Mr Colegate's collection in tissue paper, and then to pack the whole into two queer-shaped bags—pretty heavy they must have been. It was only then that I realized what they were doing—they were stealing Mr Colegate's collection; they were going to take it away. The fury which possessed me as I sat there, helpless, and watched them! The pain was bad enough, but my rage was worse. When the man who had cut off my hair moved to the window with one of the bags held in both his hands—it was as much as he could carry—he said to his companion, with a glance towards me: 'Hadn't I better cut her throat before I go?'

'You can come and do that presently,' replied the other, 'you'll find her waiting.' Then he dropped his voice and I saw him say: 'Now you quite understand?' The other nodded. 'What is it?'

The face of the man who had cut my hair was turned towards me. He put his lips very close to the other, speaking in the tiniest whisper, which he never dreamed could reach my ears: 'Cotterill, Cloak-room, Victoria Station, Brighton Railway.'

The other whispered, 'That's right. You'd better make a note of it; we don't want any bungling.'

'No fear, I'm not likely to forget.' Then he repeated his previous words: 'Cotterill, Cloak-room, Victoria Station, Brighton Railway.'

He whispered this so very earnestly that I felt sure there was something about the words which was most important; by the time he had said them a second time they were printed on my brain quite as indelibly as they were on his. He got out of the window and his bag was passed to him; then he spoke a parting word to me.

'Sorry I can't take a lock of your hair with me; perhaps I'll come back for one presently.'

Then he went. If he had known the passion which was blazing in my heart! That allusion to my desecrated locks only made it burn still fiercer. His companion, left alone, paid no attention to me whatever. He continued to secure his bag, searched the room, as if for anything which might have been overlooked, then, bearing the bag with the other half of Mr Colegate's collection with him, he went through the door, ignoring my presence as if I had never existed. What he did afterwards I cannot say; I saw no more of him; I was left alone—all through the night.

What a night it was. I was not afraid, I can honestly say that I have seldom been afraid of anything—I suppose it is a matter of temperament—but I was most uncomfortable, very unhappy, and each moment the pain caused me by my bonds seemed to be growing greater. I do believe that the one thing which enabled me to keep my senses all through the night was the constant repetition of those mystic words. 'Cotterill, Cloak-room, Victoria Station,

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Brighton Railway.' In the midst of my trouble I was glad that what some people call my curious gift had enabled me to see what I was quite sure they had never meant should reach my understanding. What the words meant I had no notion, in themselves they seemed to be silly words. But that they had some hidden, weighty meaning I was so sure that I kept saying them over and over again lest they should slip through my memory.

I do not know if I ever closed my eyes; I certainly never slept. I saw the first gleams of light usher in the dawn of another morning, and I knew the sun had risen. I wondered what they were doing at home—between the repetitions of that cryptic phrase. Was Dickson looking for me? I rather wished I had let her know where I was going, then she might have had some idea of where to look. As it was she had none. I had some acquaintances three or four miles off, with whom I would sometimes go to tea and, without warning to anyone at home, stay the night. I am afraid that, even as a child, my habits were erratic. Dickson might think I was staying with them, and, if so, she would not even trouble to look for me. In that case I might have to stay where I was for days.

I do not know what time it was, but it seemed to me that it had been light for weeks, and that the day must be nearly gone, when I heard steps outside the open window. I was very nearly in a state of stupor, but I had still sense enough to wonder if it was that man who had cut my hair come back again to cut my throat. As I watched the open sash my heart began to beat more vigorously than it had for a very long time. What, then, was my relief when there presently appeared, on the other side of it, the face of Mr Colegate, the owner of Myrtle Cottage. I tried to scream—with joy, but that cloth across my mouth prevented my uttering a sound.

I never shall forget the look which came on Mr Colegate's face when he saw me. He rested his hands on the sill as if

he wondered how the window came to be open, then when he looked in and saw me, what a jump he gave.

‘Judith!’ he exclaimed. ‘Judith Lee! Surely it is Judith Lee!’

He was a pretty old man, or he seemed so to me, but I doubt if a boy could have got through that window quicker than he did. He was by my side in less than no time; with a knife which he took from his pocket he was severing my bonds. The agony which came over me as they were loosed! It was worse than anything which had gone before. The moment my mouth was free I exclaimed—even then I was struck by the funny, hoarse voice in which I seemed to be speaking:

‘Cotterill, Cloak-room, Victoria Station, Brighton Railway.’

So soon as I had got those mysterious words out of my poor, parched throat I fainted; the agony I was suffering, the strain which I had gone through, proved too much for me. I knew dimly that I was tumbling into Mr Colegate’s arms, and then I knew no more.

When I came back to life I was in bed. Dickson was at my bedside, and Dr Scott, and Mr Colegate, and Pierce, the village policeman, and a man who I afterwards knew was a detective, who had been sent over post-haste from a neighbouring town. I wondered where I was, and then I saw I was in a room in Myrtle Cottage. I sat up in bed, put up my hands—then it all came back to me.

‘He cut off my hair with MacGregor’s knife!’ MacGregor was the name of the Highland chieftain to whom, according to Mr Colegate, that dreadful knife had belonged.

When it did all come back to me and I realized what had happened, and felt how strange my head seemed without its accustomed covering, nothing would satisfy me but that they should bring me a looking-glass. When I saw what I looked like, the rage which had possessed me when the outrage first took place surged through me with greater

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force than ever. Before they could stop me, or even guess what I was going to do, I was out of bed and facing them. That cryptic utterance came back to me as if of its own initiative; it burst from my lips.

“Cotterill, Cloak-room, Victoria Station, Brighton Railway!” Where are my clothes? That’s where the man is who cut off my hair.’

They stared at me. I believe that for a moment they thought that what I had endured had turned my brain, and that I was mad. But I soon made it perfectly clear that I was nothing of the kind. I told them my story as fast as I could speak; I fancy I brought it home to their understanding. Then I told them of the words which I had seen spoken in such a solemn whisper, and how sure I was that they were pregnant with weighty meaning.

“Cotterill, Cloak-room, Victoria Station, Brighton Railway”—that’s where the man is who cut my hair off—that’s where I’m going to catch him.’

The detective was pleased to admit that there might be something in my theory, and that it would be worth while to go up to Victoria Station to see what the words might mean. Nothing would satisfy me but that we should go at once. I was quite convinced that every moment was of importance, and that if we were not quick we should be too late. I won Mr Colegate over—of course, he was almost as anxious to get his collection back as I was to be quits with the miscreant who had shorn me of my locks. So we went up to town by the first train we could catch—Mr Colegate, the detective, and an excited and practically hairless child.

When we got to Victoria Station we marched straight up to the cloak-room, and the detective said to one of the persons on the other side of the counter:

‘Is there a parcel here for the name of Cotterill?’

The person to whom he had spoken did not reply, but another man who was standing by his side.

‘Cotterill? A parcel for the name of Cotterill has just

been taken out—a hand-bag, scarcely more than half a minute ago. You must have seen him walking off with it as you came up. He can hardly be out of sight now.’ Leaning over the counter, he looked along the platform.

‘There he is—some one is just going to speak to him.’

I saw the person to whom he referred—a shortish man in a light grey suit, carrying a brown leather hand-bag. I also saw the person who was going to speak to him; and there-upon I ceased to have eyes for the man with the bag. I broke into exclamation.

‘There’s the man who cut my hair!’ I cried. I went rushing along the platform as hard as I could go. Whether the man heard me or not I cannot say; I dare say I had spoken loudly enough; but he gave one glance in my direction, and when he saw me I had no doubt that he remembered. He whispered to the man with the bag. I was near enough to see, though not to hear, what he said. In spite of the rapidity with which his lips were moving, I saw quite distinctly.

‘Bantock, 13 Harwood Street, Oxford Street.’ That was what he said, and no sooner had he said it than he turned and fled—from me; I knew he was flying from me, and it gave me huge satisfaction to know that the mere sight of me had made him run. I was conscious that Mr Colegate and the detective were coming at a pretty smart pace behind me.

The man with the bag, seeing his companion dart off without the slightest warning, glanced round to see what had caused his hasty flight. I suppose he saw me and the detective and Mr Colegate, and he drew his own conclusions. He dropped that hand-bag as if it had been red-hot, and off he ran. He ran to such purpose that we never caught him—neither him nor the man who had cut my hair. The station was full of people—a train had just come in. The crowd streaming out covered the platform with a swarm of moving figures. They acted as cover to those two eager

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gentlemen—they got clean off. But we got the bag; and, one of the station officials coming on the scene, we were shown to an apartment where, after explanations had been made, the bag and its contents were examined.

Of course, we had realized from the very first moment that Mr Colegate's collection could not possibly be in that bag, because it was not nearly large enough. When it was seen what was in it, something like a sensation was created. It was crammed with small articles of feminine clothing. In nearly every garment jewels were wrapped, which fell out of them as they were withdrawn from the bag. Such jewels! You should have seen the display they made when they were spread out upon the leather-covered table—and our faces as we stared at them.

'This does not look like my collection of old silver,' observed Mr Colegate.

'No,' remarked a big, broad-shouldered man, who I afterwards learned was a well-known London detective, who had been induced by our detective to join our party.

'This does not look like your collection of old silver, sir; it looks, if you'll excuse my saying so, like something very much more worth finding. Unless I am mistaken, these are the Duchess of Datchet's jewels, some of which she wore at the last Drawing Room, and which were taken from Her Grace's bedroom after her return. The police all over Europe have been looking for them for more than a month.'

'That bag has been with us nearly a month. The party who took it out paid four-and-sixpence for cloak-room charges—twopence a day for twenty-seven days.'

The person from the cloak-room had come with us to that apartment; it was he who said this. The London detective replied:

'Paid four-and-sixpence, did he? Well, it was worth it—to us. Now, if I could lay my hand on the party who put the bag in the cloak-room, I might have a word of a kind to say to him.'

I had been staring, wide-eyed, as piece by piece the contents of the bag had been disclosed; I had been listening, open-eared, to what the detective said; when he made that remark about laying his hands on the party who had deposited that bag in the cloak-room, there came into my mind the words which I had seen the man who had cut my hair whisper as he fled to the man with the bag. The cryptic sentence which I had seen him whisper as I sat tied to the chair had indeed proved to be full of meaning; the words which, even in the moment of flight, he had felt bound to utter might be just as full. I ventured on an observation, the first which I had made, speaking with a good deal of diffidence.

‘I think I know where he might be found—I am not sure, but I think.’

All eyes were turned to me. The detective exclaimed:

‘You think you know? As we haven’t got so far as thinking, if you were to tell us, little lady, what you think, it might be as well, mightn’t it?’

I considered—I wanted to get the words exactly right.

‘Suppose you were to try’—I paused so as to make quite sure—‘Bantock, 13 Harwood Street, Oxford Street.’

‘And who is Bantock?’ the detective asked. ‘And what do you know about him anyhow?’

‘I don’t know anything at all about him, but I saw the man who cut my hair whisper to the other man just before he ran away, “Bantock, 13 Harwood Street, Oxford Street”—I saw him quite distinctly.’

‘You saw him whisper? What does the girl mean by saying she saw him whisper? Why, young lady, you must have been quite fifty feet away. How, at that distance, and with all the noise of the traffic, could you hear a whisper?’

‘I didn’t say I heard him; I said I saw him. I don’t need to hear to know what a person is saying. I just saw you whisper to the other man, “The young lady seems to be by way of being a curiosity.”’

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The London detective stared at our detective. He seemed to be bewildered.

‘But I—I don’t know how you heard that; I scarcely breathed the words.’

Mr Colegate explained. When they heard they all seemed to be bewildered, and they looked at me, as people do look at the present day, as if I were some strange and amazing thing. The London detective said: ‘I never heard the like to that. It seems to me very much like what old-fashioned people called “black magic”.’

Although he was a detective, he could not have been a very intelligent person after all, or he would not have talked such nonsense. Then he added, with an accent on the ‘saw’:

‘What was it you said you saw him whisper?’

I bargained before I told him.

‘I will tell you if you let me come with you.’

‘Let you come with me?’ He stared still more. ‘What does the girl mean?’

‘Her presence,’ struck in Mr Colegate, ‘may be useful for purposes of recognition. She won’t be in the way; you can do no harm by letting her come.’

‘If you don’t promise to let me come I shan’t tell you.’

The big man laughed. He seemed to find me amusing; I do not know why. If he had only understood my feeling on the subject of my hair, and how I yearned to be even with the man who had wrought me what seemed to me such an irreparable injury. I dare say it sounds as if I were very revengeful. I do not think it was a question of vengeance only; I wanted justice. The detective took out a fat notebook.

‘Very well, it’s a bargain. Tell me what you saw him whisper, and you shall come.’ So I told him again, and he wrote it down. “Bantock, 13 Harwood Street, Oxford Street.” I know Harwood Street, though I don’t know Mr Bantock. But he seems to be residing at what is generally

understood to be an unlucky number. Let me get a message through to the Yard—we may want assistance. Then we'll pay a visit to Mr Bantock—if there is such a person. It sounds like a very tall story to me.'

I believe that even then he doubted if I had seen what I said I saw. When we did start I was feeling pretty nervous, because I realized that if we were going on a fool's errand, and there did turn out to be no Bantock, that London detective would doubt me more than ever. And, of course, I could not be sure that there was such a person, though it was some comfort to know that there was a Harwood Street. We went four in a cab—the two detectives, Mr Colegate and I. We had gone some distance before the cab stopped. The London detective said:

'This is Harwood Street; I told the driver to stop at the corner—we will walk the rest of the way. A cab might arouse suspicion; you never know.'

It was a street full of shops No. 13 proved to be a sort of curiosity shop and jeweller's combined; quite a respectable-looking place, and sure enough over the top of the window was the name 'Bantock.'

'That looks as if, at any rate, there were a Bantock,' the big man said; it was quite a weight off my own mind when I saw the name.

Just as we reached the shop a cab drew up and five men got out, whom the London detective seemed to recognize with mingled feelings.

'That's queered the show,' he exclaimed. I did not know what he meant. 'They rouse suspicion, if they do nothing else—so in we go.'

And in we went—the detective first, and I close on his heels. There were two young men standing close together behind the counter. The instant we appeared I saw one whisper to the other:

'Give them the office—ring the alarm-bell—they're 'tecs!'

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I did not quite know what he meant either, but I guessed enough to make me cry out:

‘Don’t let him move—he’s going to ring the alarm-bell and give them the office.’

Those young men were so startled—they must have been quite sure that I could not have heard—that they both stood still and stared; before they had got over their surprise a detective—they were detectives who had come in the second cab—had each by the shoulder.

There was a door at the end of the shop, which the London detective opened.

‘There’s a staircase here; we’d better go up and see who’s above. You chaps keep yourselves handy, you may be wanted—when I call you come.’

He mounted the stairs—as before, I was as close to him as I could very well get. On the top of the staircase was a landing, on to which two doors opened. We paused to listen: I could distinctly hear voices coming through one of them.

‘I think this is ours,’ the London detective said.

He opened the one through which the voices were coming. He marched in—I was still as close to him as I could get. In it were several men, I did not know how many, and I did not care; I had eyes for only one. I walked right past the detective up to the table round which some of them were sitting, some standing, and stretching out an accusatory arm I pointed at one.

‘That’s the man who cut off my hair!’

It was, and well he knew it. His conscience must have smitten him; I should not have thought that a grown man could be so frightened at the sight of a child. He caught hold, with both hands, of the side of the table; he glared at me as if I were some dreadful apparition—and no doubt to him I was. It was only with an effort that he seemed able to use his voice.

‘Good night!’ he exclaimed, ‘it’s that infernal kid!’

On the table, right in front of me, I saw something with which I was only too familiar. I snatched it up.

‘And this is the knife,’ I cried, ‘with which he did it!’

It was; the historical blade, which had once belonged to the sanguinary and, I sincerely trust, more or less apocryphal MacGregor. I held it out towards the gaping man.

‘You know that this is the knife with which you cut off my hair,’ I said. ‘You know it is.’

I dare say I looked a nice young termagant with my short hair, rage in my eyes, and that frightful weapon in my hand. Apparently I did not impress him quite as I had intended—at least, his demeanour did not suggest it.

‘By the living Jingo!’ he shouted, ‘I wish I had cut her throat with it as well!’

It was fortunate for him that he did not. Probably, in the long run, he would have suffered for it more than he did—though he suffered pretty badly as it was. It was his cutting my hair that did it. Had he not done that I have little doubt that I should have been too conscious of the pains caused me by my bonds—the marks caused by the cord were on my skin for weeks after—to pay such close attention to their proceedings as I did under the spur of anger. Quite possibly that tell-tale whisper would have gone unnoticed. Absorbed by my own suffering, I should have paid very little heed to the cryptic sentence which really proved to be their undoing. It was the outrage to my locks which caused me to strain every faculty of observation I had. He had much better have left them alone.

That was the greatest capture the police had made for years. In one haul they captured practically every member of a gang of cosmopolitan thieves who were wanted by the police all over the world. The robbery of Mr Colegate’s collection of old silver shrank into insignificance before the rest of their misdeeds. And not only were the thieves taken themselves, but the proceeds of no end of robberies.

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It seemed that they had met there for a sort of annual division of the common spoil. There was an immense quantity of valuable property before them on the table, and lots more about the house. Those jewels which were in the bag which had been deposited at the cloak-room at Victoria Station were to have been added to the common fund—to say nothing of Mr Colegate's collection of old silver.

The man who called himself Bantock, and who owned the premises at 13 Harwood Street, proved to be a well-known dealer in precious stones and jewellery and bric-a-brac and all sorts of valuables. He was immensely rich; it was shown that a great deal of his money had been made by buying and selling valuable stolen property of every sort and kind. Before the police had done with him it was made abundantly clear that, under various *aliases*, in half the countries of the world, he had been a wholesale dealer in stolen goods. He was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. I am not quite sure, but I believe that he died in jail.

All the men who were in that room were sent to prison for different terms, including the man who cut my hair—to say nothing of his companion. So far as the proceedings at the court were concerned, I never appeared at all. Compared to some of the crimes of which they had been guilty, the robbery of Mr Colegate's silver was held to be a mere nothing. They were not charged with it at all, so my evidence was not required. But every time I looked at my scanty locks, which took years to grow to anything like a decent length—they had reached to my knees, but they never did that again—each time I stood before a looking-glass and saw what a curious spectacle I presented with my closely clipped poll, something of that old rage came back to me which had been during that first moment in my heart, and I felt—what I felt when I was tied to that chair in Myrtle Cottage. I endeavoured to console myself, in the

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spirit of the Old World rather than the New, that, owing to the gift which was mine, I had been able to cry something like quits with the man who, in a moment of mere wanton savagery, had deprived me of what ought to be the glory of a woman.

XII

The Affair of the German Dispatch-Box

Victor L. Whitechurch

A slight delicate-looking man with pale face and refined features, light red hair and dreamy blue eyes.

Such is a brief description of Thorpe Hazell, book collector and railway enthusiast, a gentleman of independent means, whose knowledge of book editions and bindings was only equalled by his grasp of railway details.

At least two railway companies habitually sought his expert advice in the bewildering task of altering their timetables, while from time to time he was consulted in cases where his special railway knowledge proved of immense service, and his private note-book of such 'cases' would have provided much interesting copy to publishers.

He had one other peculiarity. He was a strong faddist on food and 'physical culture'. He carried vegetarianism to an extreme, and was continually practising various 'exercises' of the strangest description, much to the bewilderment of those who were not personally acquainted with his eccentricities.

Thorpe Hazell often said afterwards that the most

daring case which he ever undertook was that of the German Dispatch-Box. It was an affair of international importance at the time, and, for obvious reasons, remained shrouded in mystery. Now, however, when it may be relegated to the region of obsolete diplomatic crises, there is no reason why it should not, to a certain extent, be made public.

Hazell was only half through his breakfast one morning at his house in Netherton, when a telegram arrived for him with this message:

'Am coming by next train. Wish to consult you on important question. MOSTYN COTTERELL.'

'Cotterell, Cotterell,' said Hazell to himself. 'Oh, yes, I remember—he was on the same staircase with myself at St Philip's. A reading man in those days. I haven't seen him for years. Surely he's something in the Government now. Let me see.'

He got his Whitaker and consulted its pages. Presently he found what he wanted.

'Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs—Mostyn Cotterell.'

As soon as he had finished his breakfast, including his pint of lemonade, he produced a 'Book of Exercises', and carefully went through the following directions:

'Stand in correct position, commence to inhale, and at the same time commence to tense the muscles of the arms, and raise them to an extended front horizontal position; leave the hands to drop limp from the wrists. While doing this change the weight of the body from the full foot on to the toes; in this position hold the breath and make rigid and extended the muscles of the arms, sides, neck, abdomen, and legs. Repeat this fifteen times.'

Half-an-hour or so later Mostyn Cotterell was ushered into his room. He was a tall, thin man, with a black mous-

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tache that made his naturally pale face look almost white. There was a haggard look about him, and certain dark lines under his eyes showed pretty plainly that he was suffering from want of sleep.

‘It’s a good many years since we met, Hazell,’ he began, ‘and you have gained quite a reputation since the old college days.’

‘Ah, I see you have read my monograph on “Nerve Culture and Rational Food”,’ replied Hazell.

‘Never heard of it,’ said Cotterell. ‘No, I mean your reputation as a railway expert, my dear fellow.’

‘Oh, railways!’ exclaimed Hazell in a disappointed tone of voice. ‘They’re just a hobby of mine, that’s all. Is that why you’ve come?’

‘Exactly. I called at your flat in town, but was told you were here. I want to consult you on a delicate matter, Hazell; one in which your knowledge of railways may prove of great value. Of course, it is understood that what I am going to say is quite private.’

‘Certainly.’

‘Well, let me put a case. Suppose a man was travelling, say, from London to the Continent by the ordinary boat train; and suppose that it was desirable to prevent that man from getting to his destination, would it—well—would it be possible to prevent him doing so?’

Hazell smiled.

‘Your enigma is a difficult one to answer,’ he said. ‘It would all depend upon the means you cared to employ. I daresay it could be done, but you would probably have to resort to force.’

‘That would hardly be politic. I want you to suggest some plan by which he could be got into a wrong train, or got out of the right one, so that, let us say, something he was carrying would be lost, or, at least, delayed in transit.’

‘You are not very clear, Cotterell. First you speak of the *man* being frustrated, and then of something he is carrying.

What do you mean? Which is of the greater importance—the man or his property?’

‘His property.’

‘That puts a different aspect on it. I take it this is some intrigue of your profession. Why not place confidence in me, and tell me the whole thing? I never like to work on supposition. Once some fellows tried to draw me on a supposed case of wrecking a train. I could have told them half-a-dozen theories of my own invention, but I held my tongue, and lucky it was that I did so, for I found out afterwards they belonged to an American train robber gang. I don’t accuse you of any nefarious purposes, but if you want my advice, tell me the exact circumstances. Only, I warn you beforehand, Cotterell, that I won’t give you any tips that would either compromise me or be of danger to any railway company.’

‘Very well,’ replied the Under-Secretary, ‘I will tell you the leading facts without betraying any State secrets, except to mention that there is a great stake involved. To cut matters short, a very important document has been stolen from our office. We pretty well know the culprit, only we have no proof. But we are certain of one thing and that is that this document is at present in the hands of the German Ambassador. You will understand that the ways of diplomacy are very subtle and that it is a case which makes action very difficult. If we were to demand the surrender of this paper we should be met, I have no doubt, with a bland denial that it is in the Ambassador’s possession.

‘Of course we have our secret agents, and they have told us that Colonel von Kriegen, one of the messengers of the German Embassy, has been ordered to start at mid-day with dispatches to Berlin. It is more than likely—in fact it is a dead certainty—that this particular document will be included in his dispatches. Now, if it once gets into the possession of the German Chancellery, there will be a bad international trouble which might even land us in a Conti-

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mental war. If you can devise any means of obstructing or preventing the transit of this dispatch you would be rendering the country a real service.'

Hazell thought for a moment.

'Do you think this Colonel von Kriegen knows of the document he is carrying?' he asked presently.

'I shouldn't think so, its contents are of far too much importance to trust even to a regular messenger. No, he will probably be told to exercise the greatest care, and his journey will be watched and himself guarded by the German secret police.'

'How is he likely to carry the document?'

'In his dispatch-box, together with other papers.'

'And he will probably travel with secret police. My dear fellow, you have given me a hard nut to crack. Let me think a bit.'

He lit a cigarette and smoked hard for a few minutes. Presently he asked Cotterell if the dispatch-box had a handle to it.

'Yes—of course,' replied the Under-Secretary, 'a leather handle.'

'I wish I knew exactly what it was like.'

'I can easily tell you. All the dispatch-boxes of the German Embassy are of the same pattern. It is our business to know the smallest details. It would be about a foot long, eight inches broad, and about five inches deep, with a handle on the top—a dark green box.'

Hazell's face lit up with sudden interest.

'You haven't one exactly like it?' he asked.

'Yes, we have. At my office.'

'Will the key be with the Colonel?'

'Of course not. The Ambassador here will lock it, and it will not be opened till it is in the hands of the Chancellor in Berlin.'

Hazell jumped to his feet and began to stride up and down the room.

‘Cotterell!’ he exclaimed, ‘there’s just one plan that occurs to me. It’s a very desperate one, and even if it succeeds it will land me in prison.’

‘In England?’ asked the other.

‘Rather. I’m not going to play any tricks on the Continent, I can tell you. Now, suppose I’m able to carry out this plan and am imprisoned—say at Dovehaven—what would happen?’

He stopped abruptly in his walk and looked at Cotterell. A grin broke over the latter’s face, and he said, quietly:

‘Oh—you’d escape, Hazell.’

‘Very good. I shall want help. *You’d* better not come. Have you got a knowing fellow whom you can trust? He must be a sharp chap, mind.’

‘Yes, I have. One of our private men, named Bartlett.’

‘Good. There are just two hours before the Continental train starts, and a quarter of an hour before you get a train back to town. You wire Bartlett from Netherton to meet you, and I’ll write out instructions for you to give him. He’ll have an hour in which to carry them out.’

He wrote rapidly for five minutes upon a sheet of paper, and then handed it over to the Under-Secretary.

‘Mind you,’ he said, ‘the chances are terribly against us, and I can only promise to do my best. I shall follow you to town by another train that will give me just time to catch the boat express. What is this von Kriegen like?’

Cotterell described him.

‘Good—now you must be off!’

Three-quarters of an hour later Hazell came out of his house, somewhat changed in appearance. He had put on the same dark wig which he wore in the affair of Crane’s cigars, and was dressed in a black serge suit and straw hat. A clerical collar completed the deception of a clergyman in semi-mufti.

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any suspicion. He sat down and opened the *Guardian* with an easy air, just looking round at each of his three companions in such a naturally inquisitive manner as to thoroughly disarm them from the outset. The Colonel had lighted a cigar and said, half apologetically, as he took it from his lips:

‘I hope you don’t mind smoking?’

‘Oh, not at all. I do it myself occasionally,’ returned the clergyman with an amiable smile.

The train was now fairly under way, and Hazell was beginning, as he read his paper, to take mental stock of his surroundings and the positions in which the other three were seated.

He, himself, was facing the engine on the left-hand side of the compartment, close to the window. Immediately opposite to him sat Colonel von Kriegen, watchful and alert, although he seemed to smoke so complacently. Beside the Colonel, on the seat on his left, was the precious dispatch-box; and the Colonel’s hand, as it dangled negligently over the arm-rest, touched it ever and anon. On the next seat, guarding the dispatch-box on that side, sat one of the secret police agents, while the other had placed himself next to Hazell, and, consequently, opposite the box, which was thus thoroughly guarded at all points.

It was this dispatch-box that Hazell was studying as he apparently read his paper, noting its exact position and distance from him. As he had told Mostyn Cotterell, the chances of carrying out his plan were very much against him, and he felt that this was more than ever the case now. He had really hoped to secure a seat beside the box. But this was out of the question.

After a bit he put down his paper, leant forward, and looked out of the window, watching the country as they sped through it. Once, just as they were passing through a station, he stood up and leant his head out of the window for a minute. The three men exchanged glances now that

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A stiffly-upright, military-looking man, with the ends of his fair moustache strongly waxed, dressed in a frock coat suit and tall hat, and carrying a dispatch-box, walked down the platform beside the boat train, the guard, who knew him well by sight—as he knew many who travelled on that line with their precious dispatches—giving him a salute as he passed.

Two men walked closely, but unobtrusively, behind the Colonel, two men whose eyes and ears were on the alert, and who scrutinized everyone carefully as they passed along. Of their presence the Special Messenger took not the slightest notice, though he was well aware of their companionship. He selected a first-class compartment, and got in. The two men followed him into the carriage, but without saying a word. One of them posted himself by the window, and kept a steady look out on to the platform.

The train was just about to start, and the guard had just put his whistle to his mouth, when a man came running down the platform, a small bag in one hand, a bundle of papers and an umbrella in the other. It was only a clergyman, and the man at the window gave a smile as he saw him.

With a rush, the clergyman made for the compartment, seizing the handle of the door and opening it. Frantically he threw his bag, umbrella, and papers into the carriage. The train had just begun to move.

The man near the window had retreated at the onslaught. He was just about to resent the intrusion with the words that the compartment was engaged, when a porter, running up behind the clergyman, pushed him in and slammed the door.

‘I thought I’d lost it!’ exclaimed the intruder, taking off his hat and wiping the perspiration from his forehead, for it was a very hot day, and he had been hurrying. ‘It was a close shave! Oh, thank you, thank you!’ he added, as one of the men rather ungraciously picked up his bag and papers from the floor, at the same time eyeing him closely.

But Hazell, in his disguise, was perfectly proof against

They were on him at once. He sprang up, back to the window, and made a little struggle, but the Colonel and one of the others had him on the seat in no time. Meanwhile the third man had pulled the electric safety signal, and had dashed to the window. Thrusting his head out, he looked back along the level bit of line on which they were running.

‘I can see it!’ he cried triumphantly, as his eye caught a dark object beside the track. The whole affair had taken place so suddenly that the train began to pull up within fifteen or twenty seconds of the throwing out of the dispatch case. There was a shrill whistle, a grinding of brakes, and the train came to a standstill.

The guard was out of his van in an instant, running along beside the train.

‘What is it?’ he asked, as he came up to the carriage.

The police agent, who still kept his eyes fixed back on the track, beckoned him to come up. Heads were out of windows, and this matter was a private one. So the guard climbed on to the footboard.

‘A dispatch-box has been thrown out of the carriage,’ whispered the police agent, ‘we have the man here. But we *must* get the case. It’s only a little way back. We pulled the signal at once—in fact, I could see it lying beside the track before we stopped.’

‘Very good, sir,’ replied the guard quietly, commencing to wave an arm towards the rear of the train. The signal was seen on the engine, and the train began to reverse. Very soon a small, dark object could be seen alongside the rails. As they drew close, the guard held out his hand motionless, the train stopped, and he jumped off.

‘Is this it?’ he asked, as he handed in the dispatch-box.

‘Yes!’ exclaimed the Colonel, ‘it’s all right. Thank you, guard. Here’s something for your trouble. We’ll hand over the fellow to the police at Dovehaven. It was a clumsy trick.’

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his back was turned, but the Colonel only smiled and shook his head slightly.

Then Hazell sat down once more, yawned, gathered up his paper, and made another apparent attempt to read it. After a bit, he drew a cigarette case from his pocket, took out a cigarette, and placed it in his mouth. Then he leant forward, in a very natural attitude, and began feeling in his waistcoat pocket for a match.

The German Colonel watched him, carelessly flicking the ash from his cigar as he did so. Then, as it was apparent that the clergyman could find no matches, his politeness came to the front.

‘You want a light, sir,’ he said in very good English, ‘can I offer you one?’

‘Oh, thanks!’ replied Hazell, shifting to the edge of his seat, and leaning still more forward, ‘perhaps I may take one from your cigar?’

Every action that followed had been most carefully thought out beforehand. As he leant over towards the German he turned his back slightly on the man who sat beside him. He held the cigarette with the first and second fingers of his right hand and with the end of it in his mouth. He kept his eyes fixed on the Colonel’s. Meanwhile his left hand went out through the open window, dropped over the sill, remained there for a moment, then came back, and crossed over the front of his body stealthily with the palm downwards.

It was all over in a second, before either of the three had time to grasp what was happening. He had his face close to the Colonel’s, and had taken a puff at the cigarette, when suddenly his left hand swooped down on the handle of the dispatch-box, his right hand flew forward into the Colonel’s face, instantly coming round with a quick sweep to his left hand, and, before the Colonel could recover or either of the others take action, he had tossed the dispatch-box out of the window.

to the Chancellor, who, as the result of a cypher telegram, was eagerly expecting it.

Somehow, his key did not fit the lock of the dispatch-box. After trying it for a few moments, he exclaimed:

‘Colonel, how is this? This is not one of our boxes, surely?’

The Colonel’s face turned pale, and he hesitated to reply. Snatching up a knife, the Chancellor forced open the box, a cry of dismay issuing from his lips as he drew out the contents—the current number of *Punch*, in which he figured in a cartoon, and a copy of the *Standard* containing an article, carefully marked, on the foreign policy of the Government. Insult to injury, if you like.

German oaths never look well in print, and, anyhow, it is needless to record the ensuing conversation between the Chancellor and Colonel von Kriegen. At about the time it was taking place the German Ambassador in London received by post the original dispatch-box and its contents, minus the incriminating document, which now reposed safely in the custody of the Foreign Office, thanks to the ingenuity of Thorpe Hazell.

* * *

‘How was it done?’ said Hazell afterwards, when telling the story to a companion. ‘Oh, it was a pure trick, and I hardly expected to be able to bring it off. Fortunately, Bartlett was a ’cute chap, and followed out all my instructions to the letter. Those instructions were very simple. I told him to wear an Inverness cloak, to provide himself with the duplicate dispatch-box, a few yards of very strong fishing twine, a fair-sized snap-hook, and a light walking-stick with a forked bit of wire stuck in the end of it. The only difficulty about his job was the presence of other travellers in his compartment, but, as it happened, there were only two maiden ladies, who thought him mad on fresh air.

The Affair of the German Dispatch-Box

‘Of course, I told him how to use his various articles, and also that on no account was he to communicate with me either by word or look, but that he was to get into the compartment next to that in which the Colonel was travelling, and to be ready to command either window by reserving a seat with a bag on one side and seating himself on the other.

‘The cloak served for a double purpose—to hide the dispatch-box and to conceal his movements from the occupants of his carriage when the time for action came. Fortunately, both his companions sat with their backs to the engine, so that he was easily able to command either window.

‘I was to let him know which side of the train was the sphere of action by putting out my head as we ran through Eastwood. He would then look out of both windows and get to work accordingly.

‘What he did was this. He had the snap-hook tied tightly to the end of the fishing line. By leaning out of the window and slinging this hook on the fork of his walking-stick he was able to reach it along the side of the carriage—holding his stick at the other end—and slip the hook over the handle outside my door, where it hung by its cord.

‘He then dropped the stick and held the cord loosely in his right hand, the slack end ready to run out. This, you will observe, kept the hook hanging on my handle. With his left hand he drew the dispatch-box from under his cloak and held it outside the carriage, ready to drop it instantly.

‘Of course he was standing all the time, with his head and shoulders out of the window.

‘When I leant forward to light my cigarette at the Colonel’s cigar, I slipped my left hand out of the window, easily found the hook hanging there, grasped it, and kept it open with one finger. Bartlett, who was watching, got ready. You can easily guess the rest. I swung my left hand

suddenly over to the dispatch box, Bartlett allowing the line to run through his hand, snapped the hook over the handle before they could see what I was about, and pitched it out of the window as lightly as possible.

‘The same instant Bartlett dropped the duplicate box from the train, grasped the line tightly as the real dispatch-box flew out, and hauled it in, hand over hand. He very soon had the dispatch-box safely stowed under his cloak, and, on reaching Dovehaven, took the next train back to town, to the no small satisfaction of his chief.

‘Unluckily, I quite forgot to ask Cotterell to mention in the wire I knew he would be sending to the police at Dovehaven to have a dish of lentils ready for me in my brief imprisonment. It was very awkward. But they made me an exceedingly well-cooked tapioca pudding.’

XIII

The Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage

Ernest Bramah

‘Max,’ said Mr Carlyle, when Parkinson had closed the door behind him, ‘this is Lieutenant Hollyer, whom you consented to see.’

‘To hear,’ corrected Carrados, smiling straight into the healthy and rather embarrassed face of the stranger before him. ‘Mr Hollyer knows of my disability?’

‘Mr Carlyle told me,’ said the young man, ‘but, as a matter of fact, I had heard of you before, Mr Carrados, from one of our men. It was in connection with the fondering of the *Ivan Saratov*.’

Carrados wagged his head in good-humoured resignation.

‘And the owners were sworn to inviolable secrecy!’ he exclaimed. ‘Well, it is inevitable, I suppose. Not another scuttling case, Mr Hollyer?’

‘No, mine is quite a private matter,’ replied the lieutenant. ‘My sister, Mrs Creak—~~but~~ Mr Carlyle would tell you better than I can. He knows all about it.’

‘No, no; Carlyle is a professional. Let me have it in the rough, Mr Hollyer. My ears are my eyes, you know.’

‘Very well, sir. I can tell you what there is to tell, right

enough, but I feel that when all's said and done it must sound very little to another, although it seems important to me.'

'We have occasionally found trifles of significance ourselves,' said Carrados encouragingly. 'Don't let that deter you.'

This was the essence of Lieutenant Hollyer's narrative:

'I have a sister, Millicent, who is married to a man called Creak. She is about twenty-eight now and he is at least fifteen years older. Neither my mother (who has since died) nor I cared very much about Creak. We had nothing particular against him, except, perhaps, the moderate disparity of age, but none of us appeared to have anything in common. He was a dark, taciturn man, and his moody silence froze up conversation. As a result, of course, we didn't see much of each other.'

'This, you must understand, was four or five years ago, Max,' interposed Mr Carlyle officiously.

Carrados maintained an uncompromising silence. Mr Carlyle blew his nose and contrived to impart a hurt significance into the operation. Then Lieutenant Hollyer continued:

'Millicent married Creak after a very short engagement. It was a frightfully subdued wedding—more like a funeral to me. The man professed to have no relations and, apparently he had scarcely any friends or business acquaintances. He was an agent for something or other and had an office off Holborn. I suppose he made a living out of it then, although we knew practically nothing of his private affairs, but I gather that it has been going down since, and I suspect that for the past few years they have been getting along almost entirely on Millicent's little income. You would like the particulars of that?'

'Please,' assented Carrados.

'When our father died about seven years ago, he left three thousand pounds. It was invested in Canadian stock

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and brought in a little over a hundred a year. By his will my mother was to have the income of that for life and on her death it was to pass to Millicent, subject to the payment of a lump sum of five hundred pounds to me. But my father privately suggested to me that if I should have no particular use for the money at the time, he would propose my letting Millicent have the income of it until I did want it, as she would not be particularly well off. You see, Mr Carrados, a great deal more had been spent on my education and advancement than on her; I had my pay, and, of course, I could look out for myself better than a girl could.'

'Quite so,' agreed Carrados.

'Therefore I did nothing about that,' continued the lieutenant. 'Three years ago I was over again but I did not see much of them. They were living in lodgings. That was the only time since the marriage that I have seen them until last week. In the meanwhile our mother died and Millicent had been receiving her income. She wrote me several letters at the time. Otherwise we did not correspond much, but about a year ago she sent me their new address—Brookbend Cottage, Mulling Common—a house that they had taken. When I got two months' leave I invited myself there as a matter of course, fully expecting to stay most of my time with them, but I made an excuse to get away after a week. The place was dismal and unendurable, the whole life and atmosphere indescribably depressing.' He looked round with an instinct of caution, leaned forward earnestly, and dropped his voice. 'Mr Carrados, it is my absolute conviction that Creak is only waiting for a favourable opportunity to murder Millicent.'

'Go on,' said Carrados quietly. 'A week of the depressing surroundings of Brookbend Cottage would not alone convince you of that, Mr Hollyer.'

'I am not so sure,' declared Hollyer doubtfully. 'There was a feeling of suspicion and—before me—polite hatred

that would have gone a good way towards it. All the same there *was* something more definite. Millicent told me this the day after I went there. There is no doubt that a few months ago Creake deliberately planned to poison her with some weed-killer. She told me the circumstances in a rather distressed moment, but afterwards she refused to speak of it again—even weakly denied it—and, as a matter of fact, it was with the greatest difficulty that I could get her at any time to talk about her husband or his affairs. The gist of it was that she had the strongest suspicion that Creake doctored a bottle of stout which he expected she would drink for her supper when she was alone. The weed-killer, properly labelled, but also in a beer bottle, was kept with other miscellaneous liquids in the same cupboard as the beer but on a high shelf. When he found that it had miscarried he poured away the mixture, washed out the bottle and put in the dregs from another. There is no doubt in my mind that if he had come back and found Millicent dead or dying he would have contrived it to appear that she had made a mistake in the dark and drunk some of the poison before she found out.’

‘Yes,’ assented Carrados. ‘The open way; the safe way.’

‘You must understand that they live in a very small style, Mr Carrados, and Millicent is almost entirely in the man’s power. The only servant they have is a woman who comes in for a few hours every day. The house is lonely and secluded. Creake is sometimes away for days and nights at a time, and Millicent, either through pride or indifference, seems to have dropped off all her old friends and have made no others. He might poison her, bury the body in the garden, and be a thousand miles away before anyone began even to inquire about her. What am I to do, Mr Carrados?’

‘He is less likely to try poison than some other means now,’ pondered Carrados ‘That having failed, his wife will always be on her guard. He may know, or at least suspect, that others know. No. . . . The common-sense precaution

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would be for your sister to leave the man, Mr Hollyer. She will not?’

‘No,’ admitted Hollyer, ‘she will not. I at once urged that.’ The young man struggled with some hesitation for a moment and then blurted out: ‘The fact is, Mr Carrados, I don’t understand Millicent. She is not the girl she was. She hates Creak and treats him with a silent contempt that eats into their lives like acid, and yet she is so jealous of him that she will let nothing short of death part them. It is a horrible life they lead. I stood it for a week and I must say, much as I dislike my brother-in-law, that he has something to put up with. If only he got into a passion like a man and killed her it wouldn’t be altogether incomprehensible.’

‘That does not concern us,’ said Carrados. ‘In a game of this kind one has to take sides and we have taken ours. It remains for us to see that our side wins. You mentioned jealousy, Mr Hollyer. Have you any idea whether Mrs Creak has real ground for it?’

‘I should have told you that,’ replied Lieutenant Hollyer. ‘I happened to strike up with a newspaper man whose office is in the same block as Creak’s. When I mentioned the name he grinned. “Creak,” he said, “oh, he’s the man with the romantic typist, isn’t he?” “Well he’s my brother-in-law,” I replied. “What about the typist?” Then the chap shut up like a knife. “No, no,” he said, “I didn’t know he was married. I don’t want to get mixed up in anything of that sort. I only said that he had a typist. Well, what of that? So have we; so has everyone.” There was nothing more to be got out of him, but the remark and the grin meant—well, about as usual, Mr Carrados.’

Carrados turned to his friend.

‘I suppose you know all about the typist by now, Louis?’

‘We have had her under efficient observation, Max,’ replied Mr Carlyle, with severe dignity.

‘Is she unmarried?’

‘Yes; so far as ordinary repute goes, she is.’

‘That is all that is essential for a moment. Mr Hollyer opens up three excellent reasons why this man might wish to dispose of his wife. If we accept the suggestion of poisoning—though we have only a jealous woman’s suspicion for it—we add to the wish the determination. Well, we will go forward on that. Have you got a photograph of Mr Creak?’

The lieutenant took out his pocket book.

‘Mr Carlyle asked me for one. Here is the best I could get.’ Carrados rang the bell.

‘This, Parkinson,’ he said, when the man appeared, ‘is a photograph of a Mr . . . What first name by the way?’

‘Austin,’ put in Hollyer, who was following everything with a boyish mixture of excitement and subdued importance.

‘. . . of a Mr Austin Creak. I may require you to recognize him.’

Parkinson glanced at the print and returned it to his master’s hand.

‘May I inquire if it is a recent photograph of the gentleman, sir?’ he asked.

‘About six years ago,’ said the lieutenant, taking in this new actor in the drama with frank curiosity. ‘But he is very little changed.’

‘Thank you, sir. I will endeavour to remember Mr Creak, sir.’

Lieutenant Hollyer stood up as Parkinson left the room. The interview seemed to be at an end.

‘Oh, there’s one other matter,’ he remarked. ‘I am afraid that I did rather an unfortunate thing while I was at Brookbend. It seemed to me that as all Millicent’s money would probably pass into Creak’s hands sooner or later I might as well have my five hundred pounds, if only to help her with afterwards. So I broached the subject and said that I should like to have it now as I had an opportunity for investing.’

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‘And you think?’

‘It may possibly influence Creake to act sooner than he otherwise might have done. He may have got possession of the principal even and find it very awkward to replace it.’

‘So much the better. If your sister is going to be murdered it may as well be done next week as next year as far as I am concerned. Excuse my brutality, Mr Hollyer, but this is simply a case to me and I regard it strategically. Now Mr Carlyle’s organization can look after Mrs Creake for a few weeks, but it cannot look after her for ever. By increasing the immediate risk we diminish the permanent risk.’

‘I see,’ agreed Hollyer. ‘I’m awfully uneasy but I’m entirely in your hands.’

‘Then we will give Mr Creake every inducement and every opportunity to get to work. Where are you staying now?’

‘Just now with some friends at St Albans.’

‘That is too far.’ The inscrutable eyes retained their tranquil depth but a new quality of quickening interest in the voice made Mr Carlyle forget the weight and burden of his ruffled dignity. ‘Give me a few minutes, please. The cigarettes are behind you, Mr Hollyer.’ The blind man walked to the window and seemed to look over the cypress-shaded lawn. The lieutenant lit a cigarette and Mr Carlyle picked up *Punch*. Then Carrados turned round again.

‘You are prepared to put your own arrangements aside?’ he demanded of his visitor.

‘Certainly.’

‘Very well. I want you to go down now—straight from here—to Brookbend Cottage. Tell your sister that your leave is unexpectedly cut short and that you sail tomorrow.’

‘The *Martian*?’

‘No, no; the *Martian* doesn’t sail. Look up the movements on your way there and pick out a boat that does. Say

you are transferred. Add that you expect to be away only two or three months and that you really want the five hundred pounds by the time of your return. Don't stay in the house long, please.'

'I understand, sir.'

'St Albans is too far. Make your excuse and get away from there to-day. Put up somewhere in town, where you will be in reach of the telephone. Let Mr Carlyle and myself know where you are. Keep out of Creak's way. I don't want actually to tie you down to the house, but we may require your services. We will let you know at the first sign of anything doing and if there is nothing to be done we must release you.'

'I don't mind that. Is there nothing more that I can do now?'

'Nothing. In going to Mr Carlyle you have done the best thing possible; you have put your sister into the care of the shrewdest man in London.' Whereat the object of this quite unexpected eulogy found himself becoming covered with modest confusion.

'Well, Max?' remarked Mr Carlyle tentatively when they were alone.

'Well, Louis?'

'Of course it wasn't worth while rubbing it in before young Hollyer, but, as a matter of fact, every single man carries the life of any other man—only one, mind you—in his hands, do what you will.'

'Provided he doesn't bungle,' acquiesced Carrados.

'Quite so.'

'And also that he is absolutely reckless of the consequences.'

'Of course.'

'Two rather large provisos. Creak is obviously susceptible to both. Have you seen him?'

'No. As I told you, I put a man on to report his habits in town. Then, two days ago, as the case seemed to promise

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some interest—for he certainly is deeply involved with the typist, Max, and the thing might take a sensational turn at any time—I went down to Mulling Common myself. Although the house is lonely it is on the electric tram route. You know the sort of market garden rurality that about a dozen miles out of London offers—alternate bricks and cabbages. It was easy enough to get to know about Creak locally. He mixes with no one there, goes into town at irregular times but generally every day, and is reputed to be devilish hard to get money out of. Finally I made the acquaintance of an old fellow who used to do a day's gardening at Brookbend occasionally. He has a cottage and a garden of his own with a greenhouse, and the business cost me the price of a pound of tomatoes.'

'Was it—a profitable investment?'

'As tomatoes, yes; as information, no. The old fellow had the fatal disadvantage from our point of view of labouring under a grievance. A few weeks ago Creak told him that he would not require him again as he was going to do his own gardening in future.'

'That is something, Louis.'

'If only Creak was going to poison his wife with hydrocyanic acid and bury her, instead of blowing her up with dynamite cartridge and claiming that it came in among the coals.'

'True, true. Still . . .'

'However, the chatty old soul had a simple explanation for everything that Creak did. Creak was mad. He had even seen him flying a kite in his garden where it was bound to get wrecked among the trees. A lad of ten would have known better, he declared. And certainly the kite did get wrecked, for I saw it hanging over the road myself. But that a sane man should spend his time "playing with a toy" was beyond him.'

'A good many men have been flying kites of various kinds lately,' said Carrados. 'Is he interested in aviation

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'I dare say. He appears to have some knowledge of scientific subjects. Now what do you want me to do, Max?'

'Will you do it?'

'Implicitly—subject to the usual reservations.'

'Keep your man on Creak in town and let me have his reports after you have seen them. Lunch with me here now. Phone up to your office that you are detained on unpleasant business and then give the deserving Parkinson an afternoon off by looking after me while we take a motor run round Mulling Common. If we have time we might go on to Brighton, feed at the "Ship", and come back in the cool.'

'Amiable and thrice lucky mortal,' sighed Mr Carlyle, his glance wandering round the room.

But, as it happened, Brighton did not figure in that day's itinerary. It had been Carrados's intention merely to pass Brookbend Cottage on this occasion, relying on his highly developed faculties, aided by Mr Carlyle's description, to inform him of the surroundings. A hundred yards before they reached the house he had given an order to his chauffeur to drop into the lowest speed and they were leisurely drawing past when a discovery by Mr Carlyle modified their plans.

'By Jupiter!' that gentleman suddenly exclaimed; 'there's a board up, Max. The place is to be let.'

Carrados picked up the tube again. A couple of sentences passed and the car stopped by the roadside, a score of paces past the limit of the garden. Mr Carlyle took out his notebook and wrote down the address of a firm of house agents.

'You might raise the bonnet and have a look at the engines, Harris,' said Carrados. 'We want to be occupied here for a few minutes.'

'This is sudden; Hollyer knew nothing of their leaving,' remarked Mr Carlyle.

'Probably not for three months yet. All the same, Louis, we will go on to the agents and get a card to view whether we use it to-day or not.'

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A thick hedge, in its summer dress effectively screening the house beyond from public view, lay between the garden and the road. Above the hedge showed an occasional shrub; at the corner nearest to the car a chestnut flourished. The wooden gate, once white, which they had passed, was grimed and rickety. The road itself was still the untentious country lane that the advent of the electric car had found it. When Carrados had taken in these details there seemed little else to notice. He was on the point of giving Harris the order to go on when his ear caught a trivial sound.

'Someone is coming out of the house, Louis,' he warned his friend. 'It may be Hollyer, but he ought to have gone by this time.'

'I don't hear anyone,' replied the other, but as he spoke a door banged noisily and Mr Carlyle slipped into another seat and ensconced himself behind a copy of *The Globe*.

'Creake himself,' he whispered across the car, as a man appeared at the gate. 'Hollyer was right; he is hardly changed. Waiting for a car, I suppose.'

But a car very soon swung past them from the direction in which Mr Creake was looking and it did not interest him. For a minute or two longer he continued to look expectantly along the road. Then he walked slowly up the drive back to the house.

'We will give him five or ten minutes,' decided Carrados. 'Harris is behaving very naturally.'

Before even the shorter period had run out they were repaid. A telegraph-boy cycled leisurely along the road, and, leaving his machine at the gate, went up to the cottage. Evidently there was no reply, for in less than a minute he was trundling past them back again. Round the bend an approaching tram clanged its bell noisily, and, quickened by the warning sound, Mr Creake again appeared, this time with a small portmanteau in his hand. With a backward glance he hurried on towards the next stopping-place, and,

boarding the car as it slackened down, he was carried out of their knowledge.

'Very convenient of Mr Creake,' remarked Carrados, with quiet satisfaction. 'We will now get the order and go over the house in his absence. It might be useful to have a look at the wire as well.'

'It might, Max,' acquiesced Mr Carlyle, a little dryly. 'But if it is, as it probably is, in Creake's pocket, how do you propose to get it?'

'By going to the post office, Louis,'

'Quite so. Have you ever tried to see a copy of a telegram addressed to someone else?'

'I don't think I have ever had occasion yet,' admitted Carrados. 'Have you?'

'In one or two cases I have perhaps been an accessory to the act. It is generally a matter either of extreme delicacy or considerable expenditure.'

'Then for Hollyer's sake we will hope for the former here.' And Mr Carlyle smiled darkly and hinted that he was content to wait for a friendly revenge.

A little later, having left the car at the beginning of the straggling High Street, the two men called at the village post office. They had already visited the house agent and obtained an order to view Brookbend Cottage, declining with some difficulty the clerk's persistent offer to accompany them. The reason was soon forthcoming. 'As a matter of fact,' explained the young man, 'the present tenant is under *our* notice to leave.'

'Unsatisfactory, eh?' said Carrados encouragingly.

'He's a corker,' admitted the clerk, responding to the friendly tone 'Fifteen months and not a doit of rent have we had That's why I should have liked . . .'

'We will make every allowance,' replied Carrados.

The post office occupied one side of a stationer's shop. It was not without some inward trepidation that Mr Carlyle found himself committed to the adventure. Carrados,

nervously towards the unseen house, 'your ingenuity will get you into a tight corner.'

'Then my ingenuity must get me out again,' was the retort. 'Let us have our "view" now. The telegram can wait.'

An untidy workwoman took their order and left them standing at the door. Presently a lady whom they both knew to be Mrs Creake appeared.

'You wish to see over the house?' she said, in a voice that was utterly devoid of any interest. Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned to the nearest door and threw it open.

'This is the drawing-room,' she said, standing aside.

They walked into a sparsely furnished, damp-smelling room and made a pretence of looking round, while Mrs Creake remained silent and aloof.

'The dining-room,' she continued, crossing the narrow hall and opening another door.

Mr Carlyle ventured a genial commonplace in the hope of inducing conversation. The result was not encouraging. Doubtless they would have gone through the house under the same frigid guidance had not Carrados been at fault in a way that Mr Carlyle had never known him fail before. In crossing the hall he stumbled over a mat and almost fell.

'Pardon my clumsiness,' he said to the lady. 'I am, unfortunately, quite blind. But,' he added, with a smile, to turn off the mishap, 'even a blind man must have a house.'

The man who had eyes was surprised to see a flood of colour rush into Mrs Creake's face.

'Blind!' she exclaimed, 'oh, I beg your pardon. Why did you not tell me? You might have fallen.'

'I generally manage fairly well,' he replied. 'But, of course, in a strange house . . .'

She put her hand on his arm very lightly.

'You must let me guide you, just a little,' she said.

The house, without being large, was full of passages and

The Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage

on the other hand, was the personification of bland unconcern.

'You have just sent a telegram to Brookbend Cottage,' he said to the young lady behind the brasswork lattice. 'We think it may have come inaccurately and should like a repeat.' He took out his purse. 'What is the fee?'

The request evidently was not a common one. 'Oh,' said the girl uncertainly, 'wait a minute, please.' She turned to a pile of telegram duplicates behind the desk and ran a doubtful finger along the upper sheets. 'I think this is all right. You want it repeated?'

'Please.' Just a tinge of questioning surprise gave point to the courteous tone.

'It will be fourpence. If there is an error the amount will be refunded.'

Carrados put down his coin and received his change.

'Will it take long?' he inquired carelessly, as he pulled on his glove.

'You will most likely get it within a quarter of an hour,' she replied.

'Now you've done it,' commented Mr Carlyle, as they walked back to their car. 'How do you propose to get that telegram, Max?'

'Ask for it,' was the laconic explanation.

And, stripping the artifice of any elaboration, he simply asked for it and got it. The car, posted at a convenient bend in the road, gave him a warning note as the telegraph-boy approached. Then Carrados took up a convincing attitude with his hand on the gate while Mr Carlyle lent himself to the semblance of a departing friend. That was the inevitable impression when the boy rode up.

'Creak, Brookbend Cottage?' inquired Carrados, holding out his hand, and without a second thought the boy gave him the envelope and rode away on the assurance that there would be no reply.

'Some day, my friend,' remarked Mr Carlyle, looking

Ernest Bramah

nervously towards the unseen house, 'your ingenuity will get you into a tight corner.'

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